

JEAN GILLES
SCHOOLBOY

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JEAN GILLES
SCHOOLBOY

BY
ANDRÉ LAFON

Grand Prix de Littérature, Académie Française
Awarded for the first time in 1912

TRANSLATED BY
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INTRODUCTION

(Extracts from an Article entitled:

THE "GRAND PRIX DE LITTÉRATURE" OF 1912.

BY THE TRANSLATOR.

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THE award, for the first time, of the "Grand Prix de Littérature," founded two years ago by the Académie Française, constitutes the chief literary sensation of the year 1912 in Paris.

For many years past, prizes of more or less value have been offered by private venture for the encouragement of literature. Although the system is doubtless open to criticism, it has achieved excellent results. To it we owe the recognition and fruition of several splendid talents. Claude Farrère, Madame André Corthis, Abel Bonnard, Madame Marguerite Audoux, Madame Myriam Harry, Edmond Jaloux, are a few of those who have reason to felicitate themselves on the institu-

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tion of the Prix Goncourt, and that offered by "La Vie Heureuse." Both are worth two hundred pounds. The Grand Prix Gobert, given annually for the best historical work, amounts to four hundred pounds.

The Académie suddenly awoke to the fact that its trivial recompenses of forty and sixty pounds were outbidden, ignored; that, in consequence, its paramount influence in matters literary was waning. Something had to be done. On the initiative of M. Thureau-Dangin, the new prize, of four hundred pounds, was founded and endowed from funds left over from a legacy. Its aim was defined by the august Forty in the following words: "Rémunérer un roman, ou toute autre œuvre d'imagination, en prose, *d'un caractère élevé.*" The desire was expressed that the book should be of a high moral tone; the condition, that the reward should under no circumstances be divided; and the intention, that it should be given annually, *if* a work of sufficient distinction appeared.

Last year the rival merits of Charles Péguy, an original thinker, a master of style, and of Louis de Robert, the most touching of emotional writers, presented a problem the Académie found itself unable to solve. The result was that no award was made.

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This year no such negative course could be countenanced, under pain of drawing ridicule upon the newly-instituted prize.

Grave and exhaustive were the deliberations of the judges—poignant the suspense of the aspirants. The condition that candidates should not present themselves, but that the Académie should select the competitors for its favour, left a field as wide as France itself, and greatly enhanced the excitement.

Writers there were in plenty whose feet were already placed on the ladder of fame. The Académie was fully alive to their claims, but its desire was rather to distinguish some new author, to discover some hitherto unrecognised talent.

A committee of the most illustrious among contemporary *littérateurs* was appointed to make the initial selection. It was composed of the Comte d'Haussonville, Ernest Lavisse, Paul Hervieu, Jules Claretie, Paul Bourget, Pierre Loti, René Bazin, Maurice Barrès, and Marcel Prévost; the five latter rank as the first novelists of France.

Numerous works were subjected to the critical scrutiny of the members, and finally, M. Maurice Barrès was deputed by his colleagues to draw up a report for the Académie.

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Again Péguy was a hot favourite. Rumour had it that the first, the epoch-making award, was to fall into his eminently deserving hands. But on the great day a member rose, and with all the persuasive force of polished oratory, pleaded the cause of a youthful, unknown usher of a country college, who, he said, had produced a work perfect in tone, insight, and delicate charm.

André Lafon, the author of *L'Élève Gilles*, had only just been made aware that his book was under consideration.*

Émile Ollivier and Maurice Barrès conducted the campaign in such masterly fashion that the prize, which had been almost within the grasp of Charles Péguy, again eluded him. "Scrutin," and a powerful majority, ratified the selection, and Péguy had to console himself with a lesser recompense.

And what of the hitherto obscure author who awoke one morning in his suburban college to find the great crown of the year resting, unsought, unexpected, upon his shrinking brow?

André Lafon, the only child of middle-class parents, was born at Blaye, twenty-seven years ago. Reverses of fortune compelled him to interrupt the course of his education at the early age of fifteen, and enter a house of business as a

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clerk. Though he did his best, he disliked the life, and was unable to settle down in the line Fate seemed to have chosen for him. His whole heart was in literature. He continued his studies at night and at every spare moment. At the end of seven years of hard, solitary toil, his perseverance received its reward. He took a University degree, and initiated his scholastic career with an appointment as *répétiteur*, or what we should term usher, in his former school at Blaye. Thence he passed successively in the same capacity to a school at Bordeaux, and to the Lycée Carnot. Finally, he joined the staff of the Collège de Sainte Croix, at Neuilly, near Paris, as *préfet*. This office does not exist in any other school in France. A *préfet* is practically the superintendent of the boys' morals and amusements; a sort of "boys' friend." As such, he must be present in the dormitory and at recreations, as well as during preparation hours; he escorts his pupils to museums and galleries, reads the news of the day to them, and is always at hand to answer questions or administer advice and assistance.

Lafon is peculiarly fitted by temperament to fill this niche at Neuilly. His book is the best proof possible of his wide sympathy with the needs of youth. Indeed, so well does he love his boys

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that his recent honours have failed to induce him to leave them. It is his present intention to remain at Neuilly and continue writing in his leisure hours. *L'Élève Gilles* was produced thus, in the stray moments he was able to snatch from his exacting duties.

A correspondent who visited him to discuss the topic of the hour found him in his Spartan little room adjoining the study hall. His surroundings were of the utmost simplicity—merely a huge desk strewn with papers, a round table with a lamp, a few wooden chairs, some shelves containing his favourite books, and, in a curtained recess, a bed, washing-stand, and wardrobe. As he stood at his desk smilingly answering questions, but proffering no information on his own account, the author of *L'Élève Gilles* looked almost as young as one of his own pupils. He is very retiring in manner, and seems almost bewildered by the publicity so unexpectedly thrust upon him. A twinkle lighted his eye as he described the humours of his daily letter-bag. Love-letters from romantic girls form not the least important item ; fathers consult him about their sons' careers ; an old woman begged him to get a manuscript of her own writing published, giving as her reason that it would please her children so much, and that "she feels sure it would have a

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considerable sale in New Orleans"; a boy asked for a loan of forty pounds on the ground that he is one of eight sons. To these freakish missives are added the kindest of congratulations from such leading members of the Académie as Maurice Barrès, the Comte d'Haussonville, Paul Bourget, and Paul Hervieu, besides sundry offers for his next novel from enterprising publishers.

André Lafon admitted under pressure that his book was partly autobiographical: for instance, the school described is the one where "he received his own education; Gilles is "myself, plus imagination"; all the incidents have occurred within his experience, though not in the order given; the boys are real, but the father is fictitious. Lafon stated his conviction that "although imagination should be a leading factor in a novel, the setting and characters must be built on a solid groundwork of personal experience and observation."

It is self-evident that the remarkable sincerity and vividness of the story are due to the fact that the author makes little Gilles the mouthpiece of the joys and sorrows and fancies of his own emotional childhood.

Several years went to the planning of the book, though only one was spent in actual writing.

The next novel from his pen will describe the

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life of a young man, again "myself, plus imagination," but under another personality; the idea of a series, all representing the same character, does not attract him. He means to introduce more incident, and possibly a love episode, and he remarks modestly that as he grows older and his horizon widens, he hopes to be able to make his books more interesting. His former works have been written in verse. They show traces of the influence of Francis Jammes, and, more remotely, Lamartine. *La Maison Pauvre*, which won the Prix Viréngue, recalls, by its ardent piety and graceful simplicity, Lamartine's beautiful poem, "Jocelyn."

The much-discussed *Élève Gilles* is not a novel in the true sense of the word.

A child's eyes gaze awestruck into the world; through a child's lips the story of an uneventful life is related in all the wealth of detail dictated by the limitations of his vision. To such, the outside world does not exist, the processes of nature are all-sufficient. Of what account are war, politics, literature, art, to the little fellow engaged in observing the growth of an individual flower, the wonder of the snail he has rescued from underfoot, the habits of the family cat, or the household operations of Segonde, faithful servant, arbiter of

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destiny, provider of treats, administrator of punishment? Through the open gate the distant line of horizon marks the limit of the world. The farm, the garden, the fields, are his realm.

There is a sense of finality ever present in childhood. Each day is complete in itself, every incident the all-engrossing preoccupation—the child does not peer into the future, neither does it look back—hence the extraordinary vividness of those early impressions, the keenness of enjoyment, the turbulence of emotion. As life progresses, the perspective changes; past and future become merged in the present, and, with a truer sense of proportion, the sharpness of vision fades. Why else are certain scenes of our childhood fixed so indelibly on our brain? Who among us does not see, impressed on the mental retina in colours that will never fade, incidents absolutely trivial in themselves, that occurred in bygone days?

André Lafon, still a youth himself, an introspective, nervous, slightly morbid youth, has managed to convey all this. His own early years still loom so large on his horizon that his little Gilles forces us to understand, by sheer directness and simplicity. To the child, nothing is vulgar or ridiculous; the people around him are friends, protectors, in whose tenderness he has the un-

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questioning faith of carefully-guarded childhood. He sees nothing repulsive in their homeliness, nothing funny in their foibles, though these may bring a smile to our own lips in reading his artless recital. His surroundings are minutely described : we see the grim, toil-lined, honest countenance of the peasant servant, framed in its black kerchief, hear the festive rustle of the silk apron she wears on Sundays, smell the hot coffee and toast, feel the warmth of the new-laid egg unexpectedly found in the old horse's manger ; with Jean we play in the garden and find absorbing interest in the first snowdrop, the downy plums, the berries on the ivy.

André Lafon possesses the combined gifts of feeling and expression. Other authors have endeavoured to portray the workings of a child's mind : Tolstoi, in his *Souvenirs*, Dickens in *David Copperfield*, Pierre Loti, Daudet, Henry James—but these have all written in later life, when the vividness of their own impressions had faded, and disillusion had laid its withering grasp upon them. They relate, as mature men, the story of infancy ; André Lafon, a youth not long emerged from adolescence, who stepped straight from boyhood into the teaching profession, has never lost touch. He knows exactly what every type of French

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schoolboy thinks and feels. The chief art of the book is its wonderful faculty of suggestion.

It is said by those who are familiar with André Lafon's former works, that his prose recalls his verse. Certainly there is a poetry about both his thoughts and his phrasing, that places him far above the ordinary novelist. What might be termed tricks of style in a more affected writer become, in Lafon's hands, merely the skilled expression of a perfectly straightforward mind.

All praise and thanks to the Académie which has recognised and drawn the artist from his obscurity.

THEODORA DAVIDSON.

September 1912.

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I

MY name is Jean Gilles. One winter morning just after my ninth birthday, my mother suddenly told me she was going to send me on a long visit to a great-aunt with whom I usually spent my holidays. A slight attack of whooping-cough from which I was recovering was the pretext she advanced. In the ordinary way I should have been delighted at the plan, but a tinge of mystery in the manner of communicating it to me had the effect of damping my enthusiasm.

My father had not appeared at breakfast, and I learnt that he was tired and was

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resting in his room. I confess I was glad of his absence, for I was always nervous and constrained before him. He would sit at the table absorbed in thought, while I tried my hardest to keep quiet; but if I had the misfortune to interrupt his reflections by the slightest sound, his wrath would break out in angry words and gestures. The consequence was that I had become a very quiet child, and dreaded making a noise more than anything else in the world. I hated this constant self-repression, especially at meals, where my very anxiety to behave myself was often the cause of stupid accidents. The night before, for instance, I had upset my glass at dinner and made a huge stain on the cloth. My father's nervous start drove the colour from my cheeks, and my anguish was further increased when he jumped up from his seat and left the room to resume his stormy playing of a sonata he had been studying all the morning. My mother knew that her tender ministrations would be needed

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to calm my agitation, and remained with me for a short while before joining him. Presently, as I sat idly at my neglected studies, I heard her sweet voice raised in the songs my father insisted on accompanying every evening. Usually when she had finished he would keep her by his side while he improvised airs I should have recognised anywhere as his. He hardly ever allowed her to return to me, except just to give me a hurried kiss and send me off to bed. On the evening in question, the same routine had been followed, and the concert was prolonged far into the night.

On the morning of my departure we breakfasted hastily and quite silently, although my father was not present. My mother moved about performing last duties and occasionally going to my father's room, whither I dared not follow her. I left the house without seeing him again.

The little town where my aunt resided was some distance away ; we went thither by

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boat, a two hours' trip on the river. In summer the expedition was delightful, and even at Easter it was pleasant, but now we were entering upon the month of December ; the cold drove us below into the little saloon, and I spent the journey leaning a sleepy head against my mother, while she sat thinking deeply.

A red velvet seat ran round the cabin, and above it were deep square openings giving access to the port-holes. Between these openings the walls were panelled with mirrors, in one of which I watched the reflection of our own little group. My mother wore a close, jet bonnet, with black velvet ribbons framing her oval face. Her eyes gazed unseeing into space, and her lips were tightly closed ; a deep dimple dented her left cheek. A fur boa was round her neck, and her hands were tucked into a large muff under her thick cloak. Only two other ladies travelled with us ; they conversed in whispers, and one of them warmed her smartly-shod feet at the

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stove. The afternoon was declining when we landed at V——.

Usually, when we arrived for the holidays, my aunt sent to meet me at the landing-stage. Justin, the farmer's son, drove the old-fashioned carriage, something like an omnibus in shape ; it was generally known as the "waggon," a name I once gave it in fun and which afterwards stuck to it. This evening there was no "waggon," so we started on foot. At the village my mother took a turning to the right across some fields. It led into a road I did not know. The weather was very cold, and my mother walked fast ; I trotted by her side, clinging to her arm underneath her cloak. I kept looking about me, wondering in the darkness where we were. Suddenly I found we had reached our journey's end.

My aunt lived alone with a servant on her little property of La Grangère. The house was old and two-storied, with long wings stretching to right and left. Near it, but

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separated from it by a large courtyard bordered with trees, stood the dwellings of her employés, the stables, outhouses, and buildings necessary for a wine-making business ; a lane led to the vineyard. We usually approached the house from that side, in the soft dusk of a March evening, or on a warm July afternoon. The carriage would turn in at the gate amid the salutes of the farm-hands, and drive slowly up to the front door, where my aunt awaited us with a smiling welcome ; but the short cut my mother had chosen on this occasion brought us in by the back of the house through the garden. The gate creaked as we pushed it open. The house seemed fast asleep ; a single light burned in the window of the kitchen. Segonde, the old servant, was just going in when we appeared. She gave a little cry of pleased recognition, and threw down the bundle of firewood she was carrying in her apron. The astonishment of her mistress was no less marked, but was instantly followed by expressions of delight,

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and she was so prompt to order extra food, poke up the fire, and fold us to her bosom, that I forgot the cold and gloom of the journey and recovered my spirits. My mother smiled for the first time, and I felt that all was well.

My aunt was occupying her favourite room, a little apartment situated between the dining-room and the kitchen. We snuggled up to the broad hearth. My mother's vague replies to my aunt's eager inquiries soon caused the latter to understand that no details would be forthcoming in my presence.

I stared about me. Everything looked different on this winter evening; the glow and warmth contrasted strangely with the summer arrangement of flower-filled hearth and widely-open windows I was familiar with. The lamp-shade concentrated the light on the table, and the furniture beyond was wrapped in mysterious obscurity. Segonde bustled about, carrying logs for the fire and laying the table; she scolded my mother

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affectionately for coming without warning, and begged her to excuse the modest nature of the repast she was forced to lay before her.

The meal was quickly ready. I recognised the coarse tablecloth and napkins, and the pattern of the plates, but sleep already weighed down my eyelids, and very soon the voices round me mingled with my dreams. When I awoke some time later, I thought I detected tears in my mother's eyes, but she led me away to bed, and I fell asleep rejoicing in her good-night kiss.

A ray of sunshine falling across my pillow, awakened me at a tolerably advanced hour, next morning. I called my mother without obtaining any response. Her room, which adjoined mine, was empty and the fire smouldering out. I looked into it and ran downstairs.

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I found my aunt sewing alone in her little room. To my eager inquiries for my mother she replied, with a gentle kiss, that she had been pressed for time, and had thought it advisable to hurry away without waking me. I was vexed, as well as disappointed. I resented being treated as a baby; tears came to my eyes, but Segonde pushed me towards the table, and I sat down to a great bowl of hot milk and some slices of buttered toast. Our sudden arrival the day before had prevented her from collecting the eggs, so she waited till I was ready, and together we crawled into the low hen-house. A great, black, fat hen was sitting on a nest. She began to cluck, but Segonde, regardless of her remonstrances, and of the agitated crowing set up by the cocks in response, raised her cleverly by the wings, picked out the eggs two by two, and put them in her apron. I knelt beside her, watching the operation with eyes still red and swollen from my fit of crying. She handed me the

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biggest, and told me to pass it gently over them to reduce the irritation. The warmth of the polished shell was deliciously soothing to the smarting skin. Segonde smiled at me, and the hens protruded anxious heads through the aperture leading from their shelter into the yard, turning their bright eyes sideways upon us. We returned to the house; my aunt had put a beautiful book ready for me on the table, containing coloured engravings of the kings and queens of France. The portraits faced each other, so that when the book was closed the husbands seemed to embrace their wives. Louis XI. looked grim and forbidding in his coarse gown and medals; St. Louis, angelic with long golden locks; but the Valois in their head-dresses of velvet and pearls were too effeminate for my taste. Bayard was represented dying at Romagnano, his back against a tree, and his gaze fixed upon the cross of his sword, under the eyes of the Constable of Bourbon. My aunt sat at a

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window whence she commanded a view of the wide courtyard beyond the terraced garden ; her work-basket stood on a stool at her side, and a tall grandfather's clock mounted guard from behind. There was little other furniture in the apartment beyond a few antique chairs, an oak chest, and a ponderous old-fashioned table covered with a woollen cloth. Tall gilt vases, a couple of candlesticks, and a carved statuette of the Virgin supporting the Infant Jesus on her hip, decked the high mantel. My mother's First Communion certificate was suspended from a nail on the wall.

The day dragged heavily. My spirits sank with the approach of darkness, but when the lamp was lighted, and ruddy flames leaped and danced on the broad hearth, I became more cheerful. At bedtime my aunt asked whether I was in the habit of saying my prayers. I said, Yes, but it was not true. In the old childish days when my mother put me to bed herself, she used to

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join my hands and make me repeat the "Our Father" and "Hail, Mary," after her, but since I had been allowed to go alone to my room, I jumped into bed quickly, and fell asleep listening to the strains of the piano. My aunt bent down and begged me to add the following petition to my usual prayers: "Pray God, bless father and mother, and keep them in health," and not to forget to include her name as well. Then, with a fond kiss, she handed me over to the care of Segonde, who took me upstairs. My mother's room was now mine, but its loneliness frightened me, and after the candle was put out I cried again.

Time flowed easily. I was happy and in good health. Hitherto, I had known the close of the year only under the aspect it bears in town. I was accustomed to its

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heavy skies and muddy streets ; I was now to discover for the first time the glory of winter. My room was situated at the end of the left wing. The windows opened on to the vineyard, with its bare branches, and blackened stumps, but the pale light of the sky spread above them far into hazy space ; on a distant hill stood a village, crowned by a church and high steeple ; the sound of footsteps and voices came to me cheerfully from the road bordering the little property. The emptiness of the garden was a surprise to me. The paulownia revealed its naked skeleton, and the chestnut trees raised their frozen boughs ; the shrubs were like heather brooms ; the currant bushes expired drearily by the side of the fountain, whose drops thawed, and fell, one by one, under the rising sun. The arbour was no longer a shelter. Amongst the interlacing of its roof, sodden lumps of twigs and straw discovered themselves as the nests I had so eagerly sought during my last holidays. Only the box-

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edgings remained green, and on the low wall the ivy produced curious little bunches of grey grapes. It was as if our sudden arrival had caught the season unawares : the house half asleep, the garden undecorated. The evenings were gorgeous ! As early as four o'clock, the sun reached a little clump of oaks, thickly encumbered with mistletoe, behind which it sank in a crimson glow ; the horizon caught fire, and the sky paled into green. Segonde would open the garden door and call my name. I went in, took up my book, and read stories to myself under the soft light of the lamp, or sat quietly dreaming in the firelight. The evening meal followed, and then bedtime. It was a period of peace and contentment.

I scrawled laborious little letters to my mother, and in return she sent her love and kisses to me, when she wrote to my aunt. She talked of coming to fetch me home for Christmas, but much as I longed to see her, I must admit I did not relish the prospect of

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returning to the town during the dull, dark days of winter. My thoughts dwelt most with my mother at night, when I went up to bed, and whispered the new petition my aunt had taught me : " Pray God, bless father and mother, and keep them in health." I do not know whether my aunt mistrusted me, or whether she had some very special blessing to solicit from Heaven, but she presently instituted family prayers. One evening, when the hot water had been put in the bedrooms, and the fire lighted in her mistress's chamber, Segonde fetched me. My aunt took up a position in front of the statuette of the Virgin, pulled a chair towards her, and, leaning over it, signed to me to draw a footstool to her side. Segonde knelt on the hearthstone. My aunt began. She recited the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Credo, Confiteor, in a solemn voice, and Segonde made the responses. Then she announced that she was going to pray to Mary for the recovery of a person who should be name-

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less, but whom we were to bear in mind. She proceeded to the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and in my childish imagination the wooden statuette seemed to embody the poetical words : "Cause of our Joy, Mystical Rose, Tower of David. . . ." To each invocation Segonde replied rapidly, "Pray for us," causing me to fear that the prayer was coming to an end; but praise succeeded praise : "House of Gold, Ark of the Covenant, Gate of Heaven, Morning Star. . . ." I thought my aunt was composing them as she went on : "Health of the Sick, Refuge of Sinners, Consoler of the Afflicted, Queen of Martyrs! . . ." The two women fell silent at last, like a bell with a broken clapper; in still graver tones they presently pronounced the formula for the repose of the souls of the dead.

My aunt made the sign of the Cross, and her gentle kiss on my forehead was more impressive than usual. Segonde pushed together the heavy blocks of burning wood,

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spread ashes over the embers, and taking up the candle she had just lighted, preceded us silently up the stairs to our rooms.

The days of the week differed little from each other, but Sunday came like a promise deferred, to enhance the peace of our lot, and the whole household made preparation for it. On the Friday, Maria, the farmer's wife, washed the soiled linen; the next day her two daughters lent their aid to Segonde in her vigorous cleaning. Water flowed over the kitchen tiles, the windows were polished until they shone like mirrors, the copper cauldrons and candlesticks, the tin dishes and dish-covers, took on the semblance of gold and silver. The floors of the living-rooms were waxed by a woman specially renowned for the art. One of the out-of-door men was brought in from the vineyard to tidy the

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garden and courtyard. The house became uninhabitable. Only the dining-room and drawing-room were left in peace, for as they were not much used, Segonde inflicted her cleaning operations upon them more rarely. When night fell, the extra workers sat down to a meal, but not in the kitchen ! that apartment was closed to them ; they fed in a barn allotted by rights to the gardener. Segonde turned them away early, ruthlessly curtailing the gossip and even, if necessary, the food. Then began her own inspection of the work done, and I often had to submit to lengthy delay on my way to bed, while she re-washed some window, or re-rubbed a chandelier, scrubbed a table, or gave a final sweep with her broom ; for she held it as impossible that I should go to my room without her, as that she should interrupt her labours to conduct me thither, although my aunt invariably advised her to do so.

She resumed her activities at early dawn on the Sabbath. After opening the rooms and

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preparing the breakfast, she retired to her attic, took off the coloured kerchief which usually covered her hair, put on a black silk one, and clean clothes, with a black mantle ; then she went to assist her mistress. My aunt wore on week-days a long grey garment belted round the waist, and a lace cap with lappets hanging on each side of her austere countenance. She was tall and held herself very straight. On Sundays her head-dress was more imposing ; it was decked with black and violet ribbons, tied under her chin. When her toilet was completed, she stalked staidly down the wide central staircase, which was used only on Sundays, followed by the maid. The carriage was in waiting below, to convey them to the town. I now became one of the party, and I soon grew to know every rut in the road, every rise in the level of the narrow streets. We entered the church amid the discreet salutations of the congregation, and proceeded to our places. My aunt possessed her own *prie-Dieu* and

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chair, marked with her name ; the old verger was careful to put them in the same position every Sunday. The lady who occupied the neighbouring seat was politely begged to do us the favour of resigning it to me. The choir boys were already accompanying the priests in procession round the church when we arrived ; some girls sang the *Kyrie* ; the Gospel was read aloud, each person making a reverent sign of the Cross on forehead and lips. The sermon followed, and then a priest wound his way in and out among the people, carrying a little red offertory bag, into which pennies were dropped. The choir sang the *Credo*. A lad handed the *pain bénit*. It smelt of incense and frangipane, and occupied my attention until the final prayers were recited by the officiating priest, at the foot of the altar, his right hand resting upon the chalice he carried in his left. The people then walked out. Segonde, from her lowly seat at the end of the church, disappeared mysteriously into the street, but my aunt was

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surrounded by ladies who recognised me and clamoured for a kiss. They were surprised to see me at this time of year, as I usually appeared only in summer ; my aunt explained that I had been ill, and had come to her for change of air. Little groups of gossips collected, separated, and moved homewards. We got into the omnibus.

“ But where is Segonde ? ” I asked. “ Is she going to walk home ? ”

My aunt smiled, and pretended the maid had remained behind to pray for us. The carriage drove the people on to the pavements, and they bowed to us through the closed windows. At the last turning out of the town we found Segonde waiting, bearing in her brown hands a large tart wrapped in paper. As I knew my aunt was watching me, it amused me to declare I had known all the time what was going on, and that the tart was no surprise to me. I offered to carry it, and enjoyed its warmth on my thin knees.

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Dinner was later on Sundays, and lasted longer than usual. My aunt, generally so prompt to rise from the table, dawdled endlessly over her coffee. When the bell rang for vespers we set out again, and after the service, popped in to visit one old lady after another ; my aunt held long confabulations with them. The names of friends who had passed away, and events I had never heard of, evoked long pauses, during which the only sound audible was the spurting of the blue flames among the logs. One Sunday we went to the cemetery where my aunt's daughter, who had died within a few months of her marriage, lay by the side of her father.

When evening came we sat silently in the little parlour. The solemnity of the day still dwelt with us. The memory of the choral service, the scent of new clothes, some intangible influence, seemed to set it apart as the evening of the Lord's day, differing entirely in character from those of the week.

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Though I enjoyed every day as it passed, and was very happy, the evenings brought with them their burden of suffering. My terror of the dark increased the agony of my longing for my absent mother.

When at dusk I was called in from the garden, I joined my aunt quietly in the window where she usually sat. She was fond of that calm period of the day, and liked to delay the lighting of the lamps. She would drop her work and gaze out beyond the vineyards at the distant splendour of the setting sun. When the wind was in a certain quarter, we could usually hear the sound of the Angelus from the town or the neighbouring village. Then my aunt recited the first versicle of the prayer, and Segonde, busy with the lamps in the pantry, called out the response; the "Hail, Mary," followed; Segonde entered carrying the light, and closed the shutters. Then *the enemy* took possession of me.

I preferred to sit idle the whole evening

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by the burning embers, rather than penetrate into the gloomy dining-room, to fetch my book, if I had forgotten to bring it with me. Our cosy, lamp-lit sitting-room, and the kitchen with its roaring blaze, were the only places I dared venture into after dark. The rest of the house seemed haunted and threatening. I should have liked to lock the door of the dining-room, and those which led from the kitchen into the garden and wood-yard. I could not understand how Segonde could bear to delay pulling the blinds down over the windows; the reflection of the dancing flames in the glass panes filled me with dread of seeing eyes pressed against them, gazing in at me.

The serenity of the two women among these imaginary dangers was no support to me against terrors which I was ashamed to confess, and which after all were as naught, compared to those I endured later in the loneliness of my bedroom. We used to climb by a little ladder-like staircase from the

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kitchen to the upstairs passage. I always manœuvred to let the servant go first, so that I might enter the chamber behind her. She settled me in briskly, and when she departed, I made heroic efforts to maintain my equanimity ; but even the shadow of the curtains was a source of anxiety, and I would not have gone within sight of the looking-glass for anything in the 'world. My fears were intangible ; I could not 'have put them into words, yet my whole being quivered with agonised expectation, and the slightest optical delusion would have driven me frantic. I felt better when I was able to snuggle in between the sheets, blow out the candle, and turn my back on the emptiness of the room and the crackling sounds of the dry furniture. Sleep soon closed my eyes, but even then my troubles were not at an end. Dreadful nightmares used to recur night after night, completely putting into the shade the ordinary bad dream where one's feet refuse to fly before a pressing danger, or one feels oneself

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falling into a measureless void. My special inflictions were these : my mother would glide stealthily into my presence and gaze at me with an unfamiliar stare of cold displeasure, which I had never seen in real life ; in vain I assured her I had done no evil, that I was guiltless of any wrong — my asseverations failed to mollify her, and finally I used to wake, sobbing bitterly. Or again, I was back at home, playing happily on the floor, building a high tower of bricks. Suddenly the high edifice oscillated, and threatened to topple over. The anticipation of the noise it would make in falling, and the subsequent furious entrance of my father, paralysed me with dread ; again I would start out of my sleep, gasping, bathed in cold perspiration. The silence seemed full of sound ; rain dripped from the trees, the wind moaned, the damper in the chimney flapped. I felt forlorn and neglected. There were two beds in my aunt's room. I knew she would willingly have allowed me to occupy the second, but I was

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also aware that my uncle had breathed his last in it. My lips were sealed ; I had no option but to suffer in silence, with tense frame, and eyes tightly shut. Sometimes my terrifying vigil lasted until the rising sun shed a slight glimmer upon my closed lids ; then at last my limbs relaxed, and I fell into a sound sleep.

I was not wholly at ease even in broad daylight ; I hated to walk through the unoccupied rooms. The dining-room exercised an uncanny influence over me ; the tiled corridor separating it from the drawing-room, alarmed me by its echoing emptiness, and the mysterious light which shone through the stained glass above the doors. The wide main-staircase froze my blood. I knew my uncle had been found dying on the bottom step, one day when he had escaped the vigilance of his nurses during his last illness, and, tottering out, had either fallen the whole length of the stairs, or hurled himself down, to terminate his sufferings. I never entered

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the drawing-room if I could possibly help it. Two large portraits representing my uncle and aunt in the early days of their marriage, stared at me in unfriendly fashion, and embarrassed me much more than if they had been those of total strangers. Every day the windows of this large apartment were opened to admit sun and air. It was situated at the extreme end of the right wing, and overlooked a distant vista of river and hills. On the other hand, I was not in the least afraid of the woodhouse, a little low cubby-hole next to the kitchen, lighted only by one diminutive pane of glass. I used to fetch logs from it for Segonde ; the piled-up faggots, the heap of Ribstone pippins, the potatoes smelling of damp earth, combined to produce a scent of autumn woods and fields, homely enough to dissipate idle fancies. I amused myself swinging the long strings of golden onions which hung from the low beams, whereon reposed cakes of home-made soap in process of drying. Sometimes an onion

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would detach itself, and roll away, splitting its skin, fine as the shard of a cockchafer. I passed boldly through this little place into a barn, where the hands were in the habit of feeding during the grape-picking season. Although it stood empty the whole of the rest of the year, the long benches and greasy tables remained impregnated with the coarse scent of rough repasts. It opened directly on to the courtyard.

My favourite playground was the garden. I loved every inch of its winding, box-edged paths, its clumps of flowering shrubs, and, in the summer, its profusion of marguerites and roses, geraniums, hydrangeas, speedwells, and heliotrope. In the long hot days I made sand-pies and miniature gardens, through which meandered tiny streams, on whose banks blossoms and leaves, pricked into the wet sand, represented the glories of a tropical vegetation. Two familiar friends I possessed, who abode in this fairy haunt. One was homely in appearance, a hurdy-gurdy player

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in coloured plaster, clad in scarlet petticoat with blue panniers. She stood modestly but firmly on a low pedestal ; the other was of higher degree, an Empire Muse, sheltering coyly in an arbour. One of her arms was broken off. I carried flowers to them. The homely one was able to hold them in her half-closed fingers, but the Muse would only tolerate offerings placed at her feet. I doubted not that they looked upon me with favour, and I enjoyed the feeling of being watched by them at my games. But when the shades of evening fell, their aspect changed ; the Muse dwindled to a shadow in the darkling arbour, the hurdy-gurdy player became a mere plaster figure under the trees, and I forsook the garden.

But I loved it so well that its winter garb did not repel me ; I could always find amusement whenever a gleam of sunshine lured me thither. Such gleams, alas ! had now become infrequent. Sometimes the golden light showed itself but for one fleeting

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moment at noon, and was instantly swallowed up in a veil of rosy mist, fading later into the gloom of early dusk. Christmas was nigh, and the melancholy of the short, dark days was upon us.

Snow fell several days running, and kept me a prisoner in the house. I spent the time with my nose glued to the window, staring at the whitening fields, and the few straggling houses that resembled ships riding at anchor in calm waters. Some passages of Bible history read aloud by my aunt led me to fancy myself a denizen of the Ark, stranded, but endowed by the hand of an unknown friend with the necessary provisions.

Christmas Eve was a day of soft haze, whose misty touch turned all things to shadows. Scampering about the garden that morning, I felt like a dweller in the

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depths of a blue sea which the sun failed to penetrate. About noon, however, it shone for a few minutes, but hastily retired, leaving behind it a faint light which grew feebler every hour. Towards four o'clock I was standing in the kitchen, watching Segonde knead a huge wheaten cake, when I happened to glance out of the window ; to my surprise, the garden seemed suddenly to have burst into blossom. I made an exclamation, and Segonde, without removing her hands from the paste, turned her head to look in the direction I was pointing. I seized my chance, snatched up my cap, and ran out. The increased chilliness of the twilight had congealed the fog on the branches and twigs and endowed them with a shining efflorescence. I tore along the paths, delighting in the ermine draperies of the box-edges ; the trees were more thickly powdered with blossom than peach espaliers in spring ; the shrubs were all crystallised, and their pendent leaves resembled the petals of flowers. In

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the meadow I found every blade of grass encased in rime. Beyond lay a mysterious domain whence the naked boughs of the trees rose like smoke. It was fairyland. I almost expected to witness the advent of a procession of angels. The half-light failed suddenly, the fog darkened to purple, and I turned towards the house which now showed, sketchily outlined, at the end of the garden ; the firelight shone through the kitchen casement, and I ran joyfully home.

“Well! and where are those flowers?” smiled Segonde.

I held out my wet hands, still bathed in hoar-frost, in a mute gesture, and threw myself down before the fire to dry my shoes.

I was enchanted at the prospect of going to Midnight Mass, a treat I had never hitherto been allowed. We dined later than usual, to shorten the time of waiting. Afterwards we gathered by the fire in the little sitting-room. Segonde, in a low chair, prepared

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meal for the fowls ; my aunt, seated by the lamp, read aloud occasional passages from a book of Meditations. Dinner had been as frugal as usual. The splendid turkey, whose execution I had witnessed that morning, and the cakes and sweets I had watched in the making, were reserved for the next day. "The Holy Child is not born yet," my aunt observed chidingly, when I grumbled at our uninteresting 'dessert of dried almonds and medlars ; "at this moment, Joseph and Mary are seeking where they may lay their heads ; the inns are full of travellers, and no man can be found willing to give up his place at the table or under the roof-tree. . . ." I thought of the fog outside, and the long, lonely road : "What a welcome we should offer them," I said to myself, "if they would only come and knock at the door to-night !" A huge log had been brought in. At six o'clock it was laid on a thick bed of ashes. I took up a position whence I could gaze at my ease into its blazing depths ; golden

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palaces sprang up, only to crumble gently and make way for further splendours; by blowing on certain spots, one could evoke long tongues of flame, which crossed each other with a crackling sound, and vanished. Segonde placed a few grains of maize on the embers; presently they burst into the semblance of little white flowerets, which I was allowed to eat. We were so accustomed to going to bed early that, in our fear of falling asleep over our prayers at Midnight Mass, we had all partaken of a specially strong brew of black coffee; so I was not troubled with drowsiness. One of the passages my aunt read aloud from her book mentioned "ravening wolves." In the silence that followed, Segonde said to me, "I saw some wolves once, one Christmas Eve, when I was walking back from the town. Their eyes shone like fireflies through the bushes."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I shrieked out, '*Wolves!*' made the sign of the Cross, and ran away so fast that I

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dropped one of my shoes, and arrived at home hopping on one foot. My word, I was scared!"

"What would you do now if it happened again?"

She shook her head.

"It couldn't. There are no more wolves in the country. That was in the old days, before they cut down the woods to plant vineyards."

She proceeded to describe those days, before the advent of steamboats and railways, when a carrier's cart formed the only link with the market-town. Her father had gone there on foot the two or three times in his life that he had had business to transact; he was once attacked by robbers in a wood he was crossing. Segonde herself had never quitted the countryside.

The time passed rapidly, and the sound of the carriage rolling into the courtyard took us quite by surprise. Justin came into the house by way of the wood-room, swinging his lantern. He informed us the night was

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mild, but we shivered a little in anticipation of the chill outer air, after the warmth of the room. We wrapped ourselves up, banked up the fire, put out the lamp, and with Justin lighting our steps, went down to the omnibus. I had carefully contrived to place myself between my aunt and Segonde, but just as we reached the darkest of the unoccupied rooms, the latter remembered something she had left behind, and turned to feel her way back, leaving me to close the procession. I grasped my aunt's cloak so tightly that she guessed my feelings, and opening its folds drew me close to her side and folded me within. Segonde joined us at the entrance of the courtyard ; a white muslin veil hung over her arm. I asked whether she was going to be married. " Just that," she replied smiling, and climbed into the omnibus after us. The fog was thick. The lanterns only made a splash of yellow in the opaque obscurity. The coachman drove slowly. Every now and then we passed a dim silhouette on

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the roadside ; Justin called out a greeting, the foot-passenger answered, and was speedily swallowed up in the darkness. The odour of the charcoal foot-warmers we carried for use in the church, created a stifling atmosphere. I became frightfully sleepy. I tried to count the poplars as we passed them ; I thought of the song my mother lulled me to sleep with, and endeavoured to recall the words and fit them to the rhythmic squeak of the carriage wheels. I was aroused by the sound of voices, the sudden stoppage of the carriage, and a blast of cold air coming in at the open door. We had nearly run over an old woman, and Segonde was urging her to come inside.

“D’you mean to say, Mariette,” she was remonstrating, “that at your age you are struggling to Midnight Mass? Surely your bed would be a more suitable place for you.”

“Well, well, one can’t just live like an animal,” the old creature panted ; and blowing out her lantern added : “Saves the light,

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anyway . . . to say nothing of my legs," and cackled harshly. We drove on. The sound of bells penetrated to our hearing ; the foot-passengers increased in number, and gradually the solemnity of the moment which could thus people the empty roads, and fill the air with sound at this unwonted hour, penetrated my being. The horrible rattling of the window-panes made us aware that we had reached the cobble-stones of the town, and presently we drew up at the church door.

The service was commencing. The church was brilliantly lighted, and vibrated with sound. I recognised the words of a hymn we often sang at home—

Venez, divin Messie, •
Sauvez nos jours infortunés ;
Venez, Source de vie
Venez . . .

We found seats with difficulty. The building was crammed, and the people not much inclined to disturb themselves. At

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last I found myself wedged in by the side of a small girl, who was putting her whole soul into shrieking in a shrill voice the words of the hymn—

*Pour nous livrer la guerre,
Tous les enfers sont déchaînés ;
Descendez sur la terre. . . .*

The organ and the voices ceased. The priest intoned. I must have fallen asleep with my head on my aunt's shoulder and dreamt of my mother, for the recollection of her is mingled in my memory with this Mass, though I know her to have been far away. I seem to recall her arms holding me close, and her soft breath on my forehead, as her beloved voice chanted, close to my ear—

*Les anges, dans nos campagnes
Ont entonné l'hymne des cieux. . . .*

I was brought back to reality by the bustle around me. My aunt, after folding her gloves and laying them, with her purse and missal,

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on her *prie-Dieu*, rose to join the throng moving slowly up the nave towards the altar-rails. I then saw that before following her mistress, Segonde had thrown the white muslin veil she had brought with her over her head. All the women of her class and the working women had thus draped themselves in white to receive the sacred Host. The column of people struggled forward, inch by inch. Those returning from the Holy Table crept down the side aisles, their hands reverently joined, and their faces concealed by the flowing veils. When they reached their places, they fell upon their knees and immersed themselves in prayerful meditation. Meanwhile, the organ made soft music. The little girl beside me stared awestruck at the lights and flowers on the altar. My aunt returned to her place with serene countenance and fingers interlaced. Segonde followed, her head, beneath its muslin folds, bent reverently over her joined hands. Both were instantly absorbed in prayer.

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At the conclusion of the service, the congregation was beginning to melt away with a sign of the Cross and a slight genuflection, when the organist struck up a prelude, and the triumphant sound of the final hymn of joy burst out simultaneously from those hundreds of throats, to the shuffling accompaniment of many feet.

*Il est né, le divin Enfant,
Jouez hautbois, résonnez musettes. . . .*

The people sang with all their hearts, and the harmony, proceeding as from one mouth and one voice, must assuredly have soared straight to the Great White Throne, and returning thence, flooded the quiet fields and roads slumbering in the winter moonlight.

The bells rang out a merry peal.

*Une étable est son logement,
Un peu de paille sa couchette.*

Il est né le, divin Enfant. . . .

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The atmosphere thrilled with joyous excitement. Little groups hurried homewards through the narrow streets. The fog had lifted. We got into the omnibus Justin had meanwhile fetched from the inn-yard, and I instantly fell into a sound sleep, whence I was roused by being carried into the little sitting-room, where smoking cups of hot chocolate awaited us. Segonde knelt before me and pulled off my shoes, to let the warmth of the embers she had just stirred up reach my chilled feet. This reminded me that the shoes must be left in the hearth for the night. The two women looked at each other, concern writ large in their homely faces ; my aunt said in an embarrassed manner that Father Christmas had forgotten to call upon her for many a long year, and that even if he remembered on this occasion, his pack would be practically exhausted, as we lived so much further from the town than anybody else. I insisted, however, on taking my chance ; and as my nap in the omnibus had

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thoroughly refreshed me, I should have sat up to watch for him, had I not feared that my presence might interfere with his designs.

While I undressed, I hummed the carols I had learnt at my mother's knee, and thought lovingly of her. I felt confident I should see her soon, for she would surely come to fetch me home before the New Year. She had not said so definitely in her letters, but there was no reason to apprehend that the joyful season would terminate without bringing her to me. When I blew out the candle, I found that Segonde had forgotten to draw the curtains, and that the light of the moon was flooding the chamber. The shadow of the window was reproduced in a checkered design across the floor. I looked with delight through the undraped panes into the starlit night, and felt no fear. I closed my eyes in the serene certainty that a celestial presence watched over my couch.

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I woke up very late the next morning, although the room was bathed in sunlight. The events of the preceding night floated dream-like through my mind, until I suddenly remembered the shoes I had left in the hearth.

I scrambled out of bed and hurried downstairs. In each one I found a rosy apple and six new pennies wrapped in tin-foil. This was not up to my expectation, alas! and my countenance must have reflected my disappointment. My aunt, who was observing me with some anxiety, reminded me of her presentiment of the night before: "We are some distance from the town, little man. Father Christmas nearly empties his pack before he can get as far as this." I kissed her as good-temperedly as I could, and ran to meet the postman at the kitchen door. I seized the letter he handed me and carried it to my aunt. Impatiently I waited while she found her spectacles, polished them, put them on, and gravely scrutinised the address.

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Then she took a pair of scissors, cut the envelope tidily open, unfolded the letter, and proceeded to read it to herself with pursed lips and raised eyebrows. She read to the very end without allowing her facial expression to convey anything to my eager eyes; then, slowly replacing the missive in its envelope and tucking it into the voluminous pocket under her skirt, she took off her spectacles and said, "Your mother arrives to-night, my dear." I gave a whoop of delight. Segonde had interrupted her work in the bedrooms and come down to hear the news. With arms akimbo she stood in the doorway, waiting expectantly. The look her mistress threw her gave me an uneasy sensation that something was being concealed from me, but my aunt merely directed her to warn Justin to be in readiness to meet the boat. Of course I settled to go too. The high spirits I was in had to be worked off somehow. I threw all my energies into helping my aunt to lay the table in the big dining-room in a manner

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worthy of the occasion. A lonely old maiden lady, a friend of my aunt's far-away youth, whom we were in the habit of visiting on Sundays after Mass, had been invited to share the feast. I took pains to place symmetrically the plates my aunt handed to me, and then followed her up to an attic she had turned into a fruit and herb store, and reserved as her own special domain. A delicious aroma assailed our nostrils as we opened the door and crept in under the pent roof. The light of the open skylight showed me a thick bed of straw on the floor, on which lay in luscious array, great bunches of purple grapes, russet pears, enormous rosy-cheeked Canadian apples, and partially dried prunes. Above our heads, bundles of herbs hung from the rafters. I could distinguish the scents of mint, sage, verbenä, and mallow. I approached the little bull's-eye window and looked down at the courtyard far below. Maria, walking across, looked tiny. The white road threaded its way between vine-

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yards until it encountered the broad river gleaming distantly like a silver ribbon under the winter sun. I was riveted by the sight. However, as soon as my aunt had filled her basket, I had to go down with her ; but the odour of fruit went with us, and in my pocket reposed two large, ripe, black prunes I had stolen for my mother under cover of the darkness, after my aunt had closed the shutters.

Mlle Aurélie arrived early, on foot, and came in by the back way, stopping for a moment to exchange Christmas greetings with Segonde in the kitchen. She was wrapped in a shawl, and a black bonnet surmounted her scanty locks. Her countenance wore the deprecating, wistful expression of one who has been harshly treated by circumstances. She patted me on the cheek, embraced her friend, who was arranging the dessert, and sat down to help her. When an overripe grape dropped here and there from the bunch during the process, she gave it to me with a little smile. Afterwards she sat

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by the fire, speaking little, but listening to my aunt's low-toned monologue, nodding and pursing her lips. My aunt told her we were expecting my mother. Their eyes met, travelled to where I knelt looking into the flaming logs, then met again.

"He is as like *her* as he can be," she murmured.

I gathered from my aunt's eager acquiescence that she was delighted at hearing her own views borne out by her old friend's verdict. She added—

"And he has no talent whatever for music!"

I longed for luncheon to begin—not that I was in the least hungry, but because it would bring the ardently desired hour of my mother's arrival nearer.

At last Segonde entered, bearing the soup tureen. We drew our chairs to the table and said grace. When the well-stuffed turkey had been placed upon the table, the maid fetched a bottle of old wine from the

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corner of the hearth where she had put it to warm, and filled our glasses, boasting of its respectable antiquity. The fruity scent turned me sick, and I would gladly have avoided drinking the ceremonial glass, but the old ladies were bent upon my having it for the good of my health, so there was no escape. My aunt took a sip of hers, apparently more for the sake of the memories it evoked than for the wine itself. With a word here and there she touched upon the torrid heat of the year of its vintage, upon the closed houses, where people sat and longed for the cool hours of the evening; the many forest fires, the prolific grape-yield, owing to heavy rains at the critical moment, after public prayers had been offered up for the cessation of the drought. . . .

The sunlight played upon the wine and made pools of rosy colour in its purple depths. What was it that this ageing woman saw, as she gazed deep into the glass, the dawn of a fleeting smile just

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parting her lips? Mlle Aurélie had turned her veiled glance to the window and was also contemplating something far beyond the flat road and distant river. I had a sudden return of the curious feeling of aloofness I so often experienced at home, when I sat silent and neglected at table, while my father brooded, and my mother watched. It was borne in upon me that the two women's thoughts had strayed back to those days of yore, long before I was born, when the sun shone upon other joys, and the gaiety and laughter of people I had never known animated the sober countryside.

I left the table before dessert and wandered into the garden. A jangle of bells filled the air. I could distinguish those of the town from the tinny tinkle of the village churches. The fancy came to me that the sounds met in our garden, to converse and gossip. I heard them in imagination discussing the news of the neighbourhood in the great peace of the day's feast, and wondered

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whether the arrival of my mother was one of their topics. I began to gather what I could, to deck the bedroom I was about to vacate for her convenience. There was nothing left on the bushes, but the ivy growing on the low wall presented shining leaves and bunches of minute grape-like berries which I picked. Whilst thus engaged I saw a woman, with a kerchief knotted under her chin, open the big gate and walk up the drive. I knew her to be the servant of the post-mistress, so I raced across the grass to meet her at the kitchen door. I was just in time to see her hand a telegram to Segonde, who received it with an exclamation of dismay. The woman reassured her by saying her mistress had sent word that it contained no bad news. Still, the blue envelope gave my aunt a shock. She opened it with trembling fingers, and announced that my mother was unable to travel that day, and was obliged to put off her journey.

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I crept sadly back to the garden. My steps led me unconsciously to the seat in the arbour. I dropped into it. The bells still pealed, but my ears were deaf to their merry music. The sun was sinking. Its fading light illumined the dreary prospect of bare fields and trees. Presently I heard my name called. . . . I remained silent. A second summons rang through the garden; then a door banged, and I was alone.

Later, on my return to the house, I heard that my aunt and Mlle Aurélie had driven into the town. I sat down in the kitchen and watched Segonde tidy away the litter of our Christmas dinner. She lifted the heavy pan of hot water from the fire and carried it into the scullery. I heard her washing up the plates and dishes. A grey mist gathered outside the windows and gradually blotted the garden from sight. Putting my hand idly into my pocket, my fingers encountered the two prunes I had stolen for my mother in the morning. Then

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my tears came, and the sobs I had so long endeavoured to control burst from my throat.

At length she came. We sat late after dinner, waiting for the dawdling local train by which she travelled. I thought she looked paler and taller. The veil she had partially raised made a sombre line across her forehead. She was greatly moved, and held me tightly in her arms for some moments.

We sat down again at the round table, upon which was placed the smoking cup of hot milk she had consented to drink. I watched her by the subdued light of the shaded lamp. Her eyes were sad, but the dimple I loved lurked at the corner of her mouth. She asked how I had behaved, and whether I had given much trouble, and on receiving a good report, observed that it was time I became a responsible person.

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I could have spent all night listening to her, but she begged me to retire, and promised to follow very soon. I undressed confidently and lay in the dark, keeping my eyes wide open for fear of falling asleep. A long time elapsed before she came up. I heard her creep into the room, open her bag, take out her night things, move about, and finally get into bed. Then I fell asleep, comforted to feel that she was near me.

She awoke me herself the next morning and insisted on helping me to dress. While doing so, she told me she had not come to fetch me, as I expected; my father was anxious to go to the South and possibly to spend a few months there. As it would be a pity to interrupt my studies, she had decided to send me to school at V—. My aunt had consented to look after me, let me spend my half-holidays at the farm, and keep herself informed of my progress.

My heart leapt when I found I was not to go back to the town, but my joy was

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tempered by dread of the new life, and sorrow at losing my mother's society for so long a period. She interviewed the headmaster of the College at V—— that very day, made all necessary arrangements, and informed me on her return that my school-life would begin in January. She urged me to work hard, and told me how pleased she and my father would be if I did well. I was to spend one day a week at the farm, and she would write to me as often as possible. She departed the following morning.

The week that followed flew to its end, my very anxiety to spin out its every moment making me realise the shortness of the hours. 'Segonde and my aunt busied themselves marking every article of my wardrobe with the number I had been allotted. The carpenter made me a little chest. It was stocked with chocolate, cakes, and jam, and secured with a padlock, of which I proudly wore the key on a string

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round my neck. A second box was bought and fitted with toilet requisites, also marked with my number. For the first time in my life I experienced the sensation of owning private property, quite apart from the objects held in common by the household.

My mother had brought me some sweets, and a book by Jules Verne which I devoured, fearing I might not be able to finish it before the term began. I was just in the mood to share the emotions of the hero, and shudder at his adventures; the marvellous events related by the author remained for many a long day, mingled in my mind with the sensations I experienced during those last moments of the year that witnessed the expiration of my personal liberty.

II

THE trials of my new life proved so severe that I hailed the dormitory each evening as 'a haven of refuge where, for a few precious hours, I might be freed from the bustle and confusion of the crowded days.

Once in bed, my spirit found a peace I could enjoy the more perfectly, because the presence of my schoolfellows acted as a check upon my customary nocturnal fears. We had to go up at eight o'clock, directly after supper, and so quickly did we throw off our clothes and leap into bed, that very few of the boys remained awake to hear the half-hour strike on the big town-clock. I went to sleep much later, often not until after the night watchman had made his

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round. At first I was startled at the entrance of this man, whom one never saw by daylight, and who only appeared thus at night, throwing his shadow upon us as he passed from bed to bed. He used to hobble in with the uneven sound produced by lameness, swinging a dark lantern in one hand. From my bed I watched him straighten himself on his sound leg, to reach the lamp on my side of the dormitory ; the grimace of his twisted countenance was illumined for one moment, then a turn of the key strangled the pretty blue flame, leaving it to gutter out in little hiccoughing spurts. The man limped down the long room, sending shafts of light on to boys and beds with every swing of his lantern, until having extinguished the second lamp, he went out, leaving us in darkness. The hoarse screech of the bolt followed as he shot it home and locked us in ; then one became conscious of the modest night-light, hitherto unnoticed in the coarse glare of the

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lamps. It flickered and glimmered upon the white curtains of the master's alcove ; a soft obscurity reigned beyond its feeble range, and diminished one's resistance to the insidious invitation of Morpheus.

By this time one ventured to extend one's hitherto tightly-curved limbs, and gingerly explore the chilly length of the bed. The windows were opposite to me. The lower panes were filled with ground glass, but the cold, blue winter night and the twinkling stars could be seen through the upper portion. The huge apartment gradually filled with subdued sounds of breathing. The big fellows, tired out with work and play, succumbed first, lying on their backs with wide-open mouths, their snores broken by stray words and exclamations. Others fought their inclination to slumber, only to fall victims presently to the terrors of nightmare.

I was generally almost the last to succumb, for I revelled in the peace and quiet after the

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rough contact of unfamiliar games, the constraint of study, and the pangs of loneliness. I lay on my side with my face turned to the dim half-light, to enjoy the prismatic colours reflected through my eyelashes. Sometimes I remained awake as late as nine o'clock, and heard the hour strike with an echo that doubled the beats and made them difficult to count. The last train whistled in the distance ; drops of water fell singly from the taps and sounded separate notes which I sleepily endeavoured to reduce to a tune, till gradually, gently, my whole being sank into the realm of dreams.

We rose and dressed by artificial light. Stars still glinted above our heads when we crossed the courtyard and entered the school-room where the gas lamps burned, and the feeble warmth of the newly-lighted stove

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failed to thaw our chilled frames. The glass doors closed behind the last pupil, the master mounted the platform, and another day began.

I sat at a desk in the front row with another boy slightly junior to myself. He was a chubby-faced little fellow with wistful eyes and a smiling mouth. He wore a black smock over his clothes, and his hands were swollen with chilblains. My name amused him, and he asked whether he might write it in copper-plate for me, on all my books and copy-books. He told me his was Charlot, and that he had an elder brother in the Middle division, who was a great gymnast. He showed me a little soap-box, smelling of scented soap, in which he kept the little blue and pink counters he gained for good conduct. In return, I exhibited with pride the new pennies I had found in my shoes on Christmas Day ; but his eyes twinkled when I mentioned the source whence I professed to have received them. I saw him murmur something to his other neighbour, and they

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both stared curiously at me ; a whisper ran all through the class, and I grew uneasy and put the coins away. Charlot drew near me again. While he spoke, he kept one eye on the master, and answered my questions as much as possible with smiles and nods. Suddenly his eyes were riveted to his book, and when I repeated my sentence, I drew upon myself a reproof from the master, who had been watching us. The latter was young and worried-looking ; he worked with the help of ponderous dictionaries, and was often obliged to interrupt his own studies to stop the chatter of the pupils, or help some one in a difficulty.

Some of the boys worked diligently, but as soon as the stove gave out its full heat, an atmosphere of somnolence spread over the classroom. I felt it myself, and was obliged to lean over my book to hide my heavy eyes. As the sun rose golden behind the trees, one or other among us would notice it, and call upon his neighbours to share the distraction

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of watching it. Some mornings it blazed so redly that we began to think the place was on fire, and to settle in our minds which of our treasures we should save first.

My other neighbour, Calvat, was short and stout ; he was such a fidget that it was positive pain to him to sit still. After vainly exhausting every known excuse for leave to go outside, he would, in desperation, volunteer to collect the scraps of paper from underneath the desks. This gave him a splendid opportunity to crawl about on all-fours among the benches, and get near the stove to warm himself, under the pretext of burning the litter. But the master was bound to guard against any risk of fire, so Calvat was warned off ; then he would discover that the pan of water kept on the lid was empty, and officiously run out and refill it at the pump outside.

Between the stove and the platform stood a desk at which any pupil it was desirable to keep under special supervision had to sit. The boy who was in present occupation took

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advantage of his proximity to the fire, to toast a piece of bread he had saved overnight from supper, for his breakfast. He used to pretend to be absorbed in study, and bend low over his book, while with one arm extended behind him, he held the slice to the flame, on the end of a ruler. The master could not see what he was about, and the boys were so accustomed to this performance that they took no notice of it. I was told his name was Ravet, and that he was held in general contempt on account of his inability to learn. He was fearfully thin, and the tightness and shortness of his clothes further accentuated this condition. He mooned about with rounded shoulders, elbows stuck out, and purple hands thrust into his pockets.

We had some fun at his expense on one occasion. Calvat managed to capture the bit of bread without attracting his attention, and for some time the whole class sat in suppressed giggles, watching, while he steadily held the denuded ruler to the fire. The

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master looked up with a vexed frown, not understanding the cause of our hilarity. Presently he observed the direction of our eyes; and when Calvat, with a sly grin, hoisted his little figure to the platform and deposited the half-toasted slice of bread on the desk, our merriment burst all bounds, and we broke into shouts of laughter.

The master soon re-established order, the bell rang for breakfast, and we filed out to the refectory.

I found myself an object of much speculation at the first recreation; but when I refused to join in the games, I was soon left to myself. One of the boys said he supposed I was expecting a visit from Father Christmas; there was a good deal of chaff, and presently the groups broke up, and I drifted away. Charlot remained with me, and pointed with

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pride to his elder brother playing football. Judging from the frown on his face, one might have supposed he was doing so against his will. He was something of a bully. One afternoon I saw him dash up to his little brother, snatch the piece of bread he was eating, and run back to his game without a word. Yet he could easily have got some for himself. Food was never denied us. One had only to go to the buttery and ask. This was what Charlot presently did, and he brought a slice for me as well, which I ate, though I was not hungry.

It was frightfully cold standing still, but I was afraid to join the rough throng of boys tearing about the playground, and Charlot knew he was not good enough to be wanted. There were two playgrounds separated by a wide path; one was for the Senior division and one for the Junior. The Middle division played in either, according to age and size. The bigger boys of our lot monopolised the football and kicked it to each other with

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much shouting; others ran about with a smaller ball; and a group of day-boarders, farmers' sons, collected together to talk *patois* and play marbles, notwithstanding the chilliness of that occupation. They would play with one blue, swollen hand, while the other, tucked away in some pocket for warmth, fingered the coppers won on the game.

The master strolled up and down, talking to a couple of pupils. At the end of the playground stood the chapel, with a bare hedge on either side, across which one could perceive the kitchen garden, the boundary wall of the property, and beyond again, fields, houses, a distant hill, and the square tower of a church. The school bell rang all too soon on these short winter afternoons, and we returned, protesting, to the gas-lit school-room, and our books and exercises.

There was bustle and noise while the boys went to their lockers and pulled out what they wanted for their work, but the master soon had us in hand again, with a sharp

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reprimand for scuffling or dawdling, and we settled down, more or less diligently, to the evening task. But there were always some among the number who remained idle, to dream of their afternoon prowess, or stare out through the glass doors at the shadows among the trees, gnawing surreptitiously at crusts saved from a former meal. Five o'clock struck out in the school-yard, the Angelus rang from the chapel steeple . . . my thoughts strayed to La Grangère ; I pictured the shades of dusk falling in the garden, the fire burning brightly in the little sitting-room, my aunt making the sign of the Cross at the sound of the bell, and myself writing beautiful copper-plate exercises at the round table beneath the hanging lamp.

A rap on the desk recalled me to my duty. The master was watching me with displeasure. He was stern, but we respected him, because he exacted no more from us than he was willing to give, himself. He never warmed his hands at the stove, was

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punctual to the minute, and brought no books into class beyond those he required for his studies. Although his punishments were swift and severe, he was always prompt to praise and encourage. His name was Laurin. Once, when I required help for a mathematical problem beyond my capacity, I went up to the desk. He pushed me aside impatiently, but almost immediately put out his hand to detain me; he continued his search for a word in his dictionary, holding my arm the while, gave it up, and turning, asked me kindly what I wanted.

Those evening studies were rendered uncomfortable by the presence of the day-boarders, who remained until seven o'clock, and crowded up the benches. When they left, we had more room; we propped the door open to admit fresh air, stretched our cramped limbs, and looked about us with a little relaxation from the rigid discipline necessary in a full class. Those who had finished their tasks could, upon showing them

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to the master, shut up their desks, and fetch a story-book from the library. If we had all finished, M. Laurin consented to read aloud, as a reward for our diligence. In a second all the books would be cleared away, our arms crossed comfortably before us, and our attention riveted upon him. The gas-jets hummed like a hive of bees, while we listened intently to blood-curdling adventures of big-game hunters among wild beasts.

Less exciting tales were not received in such complimentary silence. As far as I was concerned, however, nothing thrilled me so agreeably as the story of Blanquette, M. Seguin's goat. I followed every step of its wanderings in imagination.

"Tout à coup, la montagne devint violette ; c'était le soir. . . . 'Reviens,' disait la trompe. . . . 'Hou, hou,' faisait le loup. . . ."

"He eats it in the end," whispered Charlot, gravely nodding his head, the first time I heard the story. Poor little chap, the chilblains on his hands swelled up so at night,

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that he would lay them on the table in front of him and sign to me to look at his "toads." The pressure of a finger upon them left a broad white mark. He rubbed them softly against the rough serge of his knickerbockers and listened, still smiling, though with a little frown of pain on his chubby face.

The dinner-bell brought our treat to a close. We had to file out into the dark courtyard, in the cold night air, and allow the Middle division to pass by. They used to sneer and grin, when they heard us discussing the story just read to us.

By dint of standing apart, watching the other fellows play, I gradually got to know something of their characters. Rupert held undisputed sway ; his rule was accepted, less through fear of his heavy hand, than from acknowledgment of his pre-eminence in all

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games and athletic exercises. Standing squarely, with legs wide apart, he could swing back his arm and throw a ball further than any one else ; the thud of his boot on the football was heard all over the playground ; he could kick it the full length of the ground, and sometimes even over the hedge into the kitchen garden. If it lodged in a tree, he retrieved it by throwing wooden balls at it. This happened fairly often, and was a pleasing diversion for us. We used to make a circle round him to watch the performance. Calvat fielded the balls, and even the Senior division interrupted their game and leant upon the railing to look on. Rupert's voice dominated the playground, giving directions, urging on the lazy ones, or reproving bad players with threatening gestures. Usually nobody disputed his ruling, but sometimes the elder Charlot attempted to argue or justify himself ; then Rupert, confident in his supremacy, became so indignant, that the smaller boy was speedily reduced to silence. Rupert's

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excessive expenditure of energy made him get hot very quickly, and he would throw off his jacket and toss it to a Junior, who hung it on the railing or carried it on his arm. A tight-fitting blue jersey threw into relief his ruddy brown hair and fair skin, and revealed the play of his swelling muscles. His legs were always bare and red. He had no favourites; indeed, he affected to despise his own division, and only condescended to converse with those of the Seniors who threw him an occasional observation from their own portion of the playground.

Only one of our fellows was able to attract his notice, Méjean, whose evident hero-worship flattered the great man. Méjean was the best dressed among the boarders. We envied his fashionable caps and smart brown boots. He wore dark jerseys like Rupert's, but he had collars and cuffs worked in lighter colours, and the slightest rent or stain caused him to change into another, equally fascinating. Rupert always chose

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him in making up a side, and passed over his mistakes ; once he honoured him by exchanging caps with him for a whole recreation.

Other boys, whose acquaintance I had not yet made, circled round these two. There were some who never played games. Ravet was one. He made no friends, and checked all advances by imitating, with a silly giggle, any observation made to him. He lounged about with his eyes on the ground and his raw, red hands partially hidden in his tight pockets, searching always for any possessions that might have been dropped. He collected thus marbles, shirt-buttons, uniform buttons, penknives, indiarubber, penholders, pencils, and even money. Whenever anything was missed, Ravet was applied to, and the property could be bought back at the price of one or more good-conduct counters, according to its value. But a regular procedure had to be gone through previously. First he feigned ignorance ; then he required a full description of the lost article, and would

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begin by attempting to foist some object of smaller value on the loser. Often he only made restitution under stress of kicks and blows.

Florent and Mouque strolled together, reciting their lessons to each other. They both had intensely black eyes, but whereas Florent's were mild and widely opened, Mouque's were sulky and sly, half concealed by bushy eyebrows. When the ball landed in their direction they always sent it back, but Mouque's kick was like an explosion of wrath.

Two others were always appealing to the master to settle their endless disputes ; sometimes a ring of listeners assembled round them. Then 'Rupert pounced down and separated them, shoving them roughly apart ; but they would continue their argument quite oblivious of any interruption, shouting at each other across the intervening space. Their discussions invariably concerned the books they were reading : the existence of the

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Nautilus, for instance, or the possibility of Jules Verne's shrapnel shell reaching the moon. They were too small and frail to fight; Terrouet had sharp features and a pointed chin; Béreng's cheeks were chubby, his eyes prominent, and his mouth overflowing with opinions he stammered too much to bring out in time. When forcibly torn apart they would fall back, appeal to their captors, win them over to their side, and return with an increased following to resume the interrupted dispute. Finally they referred it to M. Laurin, and spent the remainder of the recreation with him. Béreng was a Spaniard. He spoke in complicated phrases, preferring always to express his thoughts by means of words not in common use; Terrouet's voluble chaff and inextinguishable laughter usually managed to disconcert and silence his opponent. They never hit each other or lost their tempers, and on rare occasions M. Laurin was even able to bring them into agreement.

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Charlot took the greatest interest in all the incidents of the recreation. He generally stood with his shoulders propped against the railings, staring about him with his hands tucked under his blouse, whistling softly through his clenched teeth. He had an extensive *répertoire* of music he had picked up at home from his mother, a teacher of music. He was known by the nickname of "Grand-papa," on account of his wrinkled forehead.

Sometimes the watchman, making his nightly round through the dormitory, startled me out of my sleep. He hobbled through all the rooms two or three times during the night; his lantern cast a moving circle of light on the floor as he walked. He used to raise it to scan the features of any boy who was talking in his sleep, and would shake the iron foot of the bed to silence him.

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Once I woke when he shut off a tap which had been running for hours. The sound of the trickling water had mingled with my dreams and given me the impression of ceaseless falling rain. But, as a rule, he merely floated as a wraith before our semi-consciousness. The darkness closed in again behind him ; the master's alcove resumed its likeness to a shrine, the long folds of its white curtains seeming to shudder and quake under the flickering of the night-light. The breathing of many boys, in some cases sharp and nasal, in others laboured, produced a constant buzz. Rupert, my nearest neighbour, slept heavily ; his turbulent dreams never woke him. Often he would enact in them the games, fights, or events of the day, shouting a name, abusing some fellow, throwing his arms about, and even flinging himself half out of bed. Another would start coughing desperately, and stuff his head under the bedclothes to deaden the sound. From Florent came the long-drawn moan with

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which he soothed his slumbers. He worked well in the day, and eluded observation by his silence and solitary habits; but the moment he fell asleep a soft wailing broke from his lips and continued all night.

From my bed I could see Bérang's, always distinguishable by the quantity of clothes heaped upon it. His position was envied by us all, because the kitchen chimney ran up the wall alongside his bed, and gave out a certain amount of warmth; but even with this advantage, Bérang only consented to undress after repeated orders from the master. When he did so, he threw everything off in a prodigious hurry and jumped on to his bed, where he sat curled up, pressing his chin tightly upon his clasped knees to stop the chattering of his teeth. The master forced him to lie down between the sheets, but nothing would induce him to stretch out his legs. Soon as the gas was out, and M. Laurin in his alcove, Bérang spread his jacket and trousers over the bed-

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clothes. Méjean slept close to him, under a warm scarlet eider-down.

Additional sounds filtered in from the outside ; footsteps from the street, the song of a passer-by, angry yowling of fighting cats ; but at last all was quiet. Peace brooded over us ; all the restless spirits were still. It was said that Gernon walked in his sleep. Charlot was supposed to have seen him one night at the foot of his bed, in his long, white night-shirt, feeling his way, with wide-dilated eyes. . . . I should have dreaded a nocturnal visit from him, but he lay far away beyond the alcove. My half-closed eyes rested upon the glimmering night-light ; the flame quivered and danced and took on the semblance of a will-o'-the-wisp, beckoning to me, until my heavy lids drooped, and I slept.

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Three long weeks went by on leaden feet before I was allowed to go to La Grangère. Segonde brought me jam and fresh fruit, and pretended my aunt was unwell ; but I think myself that she was acting on the advice of the headmaster, who probably thought I should settle down better at first without the distraction of a half-holiday at home. I complained to my mother. I wrote to her on Thursdays and Sundays, the regular days set apart for home-letters. I should have done so oftener, had I been able to conceal what I was doing, like some of the others ; but my desk was in the front row, and my writing-paper pink. It would have caught the master's eye at once. My mother wrote from a little town in Provence ; she exhorted me to be patient, to work hard, not to give way to low spirits, and to trust always to her unalterable affection for me. I used to carry her letters in my pocket, and read them over every night when my work was done. I slept with them under my pillow.

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I hated the Sunday tramp into the country with the school, even more than the Thursday one. The streets we traversed, walking two and two like prisoners, were gay with holiday-makers who stopped to stare at us. I forgot my pride in my new uniform, when I saw nicely-dressed children clinging to their mothers' hands. When we got beyond the precincts of the town, the master gave a signal, the ranks broke up, and we grouped ourselves according to our liking.

The sights and scents of the country pleased me at first, but presently I grew bored and languid. The fields were deserted, the farmhouses closed, the bells called happier folk to church; their sound pervaded the air, and seemed at times to clang in the grey heavens above. We lounged idly along, with an occasional fillip from the master, who feared lest we should not have time to accomplish the prescribed round. M. Laurin was not always with us. Sometimes the master of the Middle division came, and

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brought half his pupils. He was a disagreeable person, with a temper soured by the difficulty of managing his unruly class; he was sometimes cross even to us, but neither master permitted any lagging behind.

We walked along in twos and threes. Some, of whom I was generally one, preferred to be alone. Weeds were beginning to flourish on the banks of the ditches; the red berries of the hawthorn, and the orange fruit of the wild-rose decked the thick hedges. There was a faint odour of decaying leaves; in the far distance, beyond the bare stumps of the vineyards, the horizon disappeared behind a veil of haze. Charlot collected pebbles. He moved with bent head, continually stooping to pick up one, which was presently rejected in favour of a finer specimen. In the end, his uniform pockets stuck out as prominently as those of his weekday smock, which usually contained a handkerchief, some string, a top, good-conduct counters, chalk, a knife, and sometimes even

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more precious possessions which Ravet would have given his eyes to secure. Some of the stones he gathered and showed me were polished like glass, others so translucent that he thought they must contain congealed water ; one was lovely ; it had been split in two by a road-mender's hammer, and showed its crystalline heart of pale lilac, the colour of the rosary my aunt used in church. Two rough ones that we struck together gave out sparks and smelt of burning. Charlot trotted from one find to another, as busily happy as if the road his schoolfellows trod so carelessly underfoot were sown with treasure. Béreng and Terrouet walked in front, the centre of a large group, arguing as usual, each endeavouring to persuade his listeners. The Middle division, reinforced by Rupert and the elder Charlot, led the van. They went so fast that we often called to them to stop. Once, when they were waiting for us, they attempted to light cigarettes, but the smoke betrayed them, and we had to

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stand by for some moments while M. Laurin administered a severe reprimand.

Our walk brought us back to the College about dusk. There were lights in the windows of the little town ; people were returning home. We ran up to the dormitory, changed back into everyday clothes, had tea, and found the big schoolroom ready for us, warmed and lighted.

The clang of the bell now ushered in the dreariest hour of the twenty-four. Our numbers, greatly depleted by the quantity of boys away on leave, left large, empty spaces on the benches, which inevitably attuned our thoughts to envy of the lucky absentees. We, who languished in captivity through punishment, or owing to the forgetfulness of friends, were the disinherited of the earth. The dreary days of the long week had been lightened by anticipation of pleasure on Sunday. Early Mass in the chapel seemed the forerunner of delights to come. We could endure the morning recreation, the tedious

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dressing and final inspection, but when the day was over, the poor prisoners' sole prospect was an evening of immobility under the flaring gas-lamps, a scrappy supper, and a disciplined undressing. . . . Our Sunday had been a sad disappointment. Story-books failed to please. Béreng had heard them all in the course of the past four years, and with his arms sprawling over his desk, and his heavy head laid upon them, would sigh, "I am so bored!" when M. Laurin begged him to sit up and behave like a gentleman. Even I knew all the contents of the *Bibliothèque Rose*, and was tired of books of travel. The good boys played at oughts and crosses, or looked out places on the map of Europe. Mouque alone had the moral courage to con over the lessons he had already prepared for the next day. If a suppressed laugh was heard, M. Laurin, who usually objected to the slightest sound, did not raise his eyes from his book. The light of the gas was reflected in the dark windows. The hours

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dragged fearfully, and for once we longed for the sound of the bell.

One by one the boys who had spent the day away came in. We slid along the benches to get close to them and hear their news. Some had walked by the river with their families among the townspeople. They told us which of the day-boarders they had met, and exhibited the oranges with which their pockets were stuffed. They were distinguishable by the uniform they still wore, and the light of excitement in their eyes. Others arrived in time for supper. They sat in their places, but gave away their portions, having already dined at home. Some, still later, joined us on the way up to bed. Méjean was the only one who had leave to return after even the master had retired to bed and the dormitory was quiet for the night. I could hear him creep to his bed on the tips of his creaky boots, pull off his stiff Sunday shirt, eat a last biscuit, or drop nuts from his pocket, which rolled noisily away under the beds.

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At last, one Sunday, I woke with the delightful prospect of going home in a few hours. Maria had looked in the day before, on her way to market, to say my aunt would call for me after High Mass. When I jumped into the omnibus I wished it might be for ever! And such a longing to chatter came over me that, regardless of the horrid rattling of the windows, I poured every detail of my new life into my aunt's willing ears. She was quite bewildered, and lost herself in the maze of the pictures I conjured up. But I was more than willing to repeat everything over again, and I talked so volubly that I never noticed our arrival at the farm.

I hurried to resume possession of my kingdom. I ran into the garden, which I had left buried in its winter sleep. It was just beginning to stir. Early snowdrops were everywhere in bloom, and under some sheltering leaves I found a violet. I picked it, but it had no scent. The air was mild, I was free,

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and my heart leapt with happiness. The day was full of bliss.

Sundays became the longed-for goal of the hated school-weeks. I lived in anticipation of them, and behaved circumspectly lest I should be deprived of my treat. Saturday was an unbearable day, nearly as long as the whole of the week put together. I wondered how my schoolfellows could resign themselves to spend the seventh day just like any other, and I shuddered when I looked back to the time when I also was a prisoner on Sundays. Each visit to La Grangère revealed some fresh treasure in the garden. When the snowdrops fell victims to the cold nights, the crocuses reared their little golden heads ; the hyacinths exhibited their scented waxen curls ; anemones followed, and the delicate fronds of lilac, while the spikes of the chestnut trees began to unveil their beauties. Humble rose-leaves ventured forth, and shoots, of which I knew neither the name nor the promise, broke through the brittle soil of the borders.

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One day I found some periwinkles. I begged my aunt to let me invite Charlot. He dared not come without his brother, but the latter declined, so I was able to have my chum.

His delight almost deprived him of speech. He was immensely respectful to Segonde, and gazed at my aunt in mute gratitude. At first we attempted a game, but there were too many distractions. He leant ecstatically over the marble basin wherein dwelt two gold-fish. The moist earth teemed with little, flat, red insects with black marks on their backs; Charlot gravely assured me these represented their names, inscribed in ink, for fear they should lose themselves. They moved sideways, in couples. He discovered snails under the box borders, and collected them in his cap; we carried them to the hens, and watched them peck them to pieces with their cruel beaks. Their cackle and bright, inquisitive eyes amused Charlot; he bade me observe how daintily they picked their way through the damp grass. They looked vel-

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vety black in the shade, but the sunshine clothed them in a gleaming coat of armour. We found their eggs still warm in the straw, and carried them to the kitchen when we were called for lunch. Segonde stood at the door and handed us slices of bread spread with her choicest jam. We ate them in the arbour, amid the checkered shadows of the growing leaves. Charlot talked to me of his mother. She lived alone, he said, but had not written to him for a long time, because she was away travelling. When he was quite small she sent him to a relation in the country to be taken care of, and a long time elapsed before she was able to go and see him; when she did, he had forgotten her, and called her "Mademoiselle." He wondered why she burst out crying. After that she sent him to join his elder brother at our school. I saw her one Thursday in the playground with her boys. The Seniors were staring at her, whispering and grinning among themselves.

After lunch, we sat watching the quiet

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countryside through the branches of the trees. Charlot swung his legs backwards and forwards, and whistled a favourite polka through his teeth. Suddenly I discovered I had overlooked an egg in my pocket and it had smashed! We agreed to say nothing about it, but we looked so guilty when we encountered my aunt's eagle eye, that I had to confess, and was hurried off to have my waistcoat cleaned. After that, whenever we had eggs in the school refectory, Charlot used to wink at me, in remembrance of our day at La Grangère.

Happy were those days when, after a long afternoon spent in the garden, I ran into the house in the fading light, to be welcomed by the glow of the lamp, the warmth of the fire, and the dancing reflections on the polished panels of the old furniture! I had obtained permission, by special favour, to stay the night at La Grangère and return to school early on the Monday morning; so that I had the delightful consciousness that I was to sleep

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in my own comfortable bed, and that a whole night lay between me and the moment of departure. The hours passed pleasantly, marked off by the musical tinkle of the clock under its glass globe ; I enjoyed my book, and our simple dinner, and the serene evening closed with prayer.

Easter was approaching. We were to break up for the holidays on the eve of Palm Sunday. Each one of us possessed a pocket calendar and scratched off each day as it passed. We reckoned up, not only the number of days, but the hours and minutes as well, with, as may be imagined, marvellous discrepancies in the results. Printed forms were handed to us, with a request that we should notify the time of our departure, our destination, and the form of locomotion we proposed to patronise. Rupert, whose father

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was a landed proprietor in the district, was to go on foot, alone. Florent was to be dropped at his home in a neighbouring village, with others, by an omnibus hired to make the round. Calvat, Méjean, and a few more, went by train to the market-town; Béreng, who had anticipated being left at school, was after all to go to Spain; he showed us on the map the mountains and plains he would traverse on the journey. We were wild with impatience. We younger ones could be controlled, but there were queer sounds from the Seniors, and the uproar from the Middle division reached us through the wall. They were quite out of hand; they sang choruses and laughed boisterously. A few were kept back for a day or two, but as such a punishment hit the masters equally with their pupils, it was not very generally inflicted.

The longed-for Saturday dawned at last, and at four o'clock in the afternoon the first batch went off, simultaneously with the day-

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boarders. I had to wait for Justin to fetch me. He was rather late, so that I saw the last of the boys escorted to the trains by masters. A few from the Senior and Middle divisions had to remain till the next morning to expiate their bad conduct. Ravet was to stay altogether, and so was Charlot; his elder brother had been invited alone to his godfather's house. Calvat had just been caught in a nefarious and very remunerative traffic with oranges, which he had carried on with the assistance of a day-boarder, so he was punished by two days' detention at school. I promised to fetch Charlot often to spend the day, but as I drove off I looked back, and saw him wiping away his tears, in the dreary waste of the playground.

I returned to the uneventful daily round at La Grangère. A letter just received from my mother announced her return from the South and her probable visit to us the following week. My aunt read aloud the part of the letter that concerned me; it was full of

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tenderness and happy anticipation. I appreciated it all the more, for having been so long deprived of personal happiness. On Sunday, we carried branches of flowering laurel to church to be blessed. They smelt delicious, and Segonde fastened them to the crucifixes above our beds. With the advent of Holy Week a universal hush fell upon our little corner of the world. Even the town, whither I accompanied my aunt to Benediction, was wrapped in a religious calm. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday the streets were deserted. The weather was grey. We walked with bent heads against a tempestuous wind; we met only a few devout women struggling like ourselves to Tenebrae or the Way of the Cross; their quiet footsteps echoed among the closed shop fronts. We prayed before a crucifix veiled in purple. No bells rang. "They have gone to Rome," said Segonde. "One must get up very early in the morning to see them start." I ventured no response. My faith

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in her information had been somewhat shaken by the discovery that she had misled me in the matter of Father Christmas, but the universal silence produced a peculiar impression upon me. The resources of the house sufficed for our food. My aunt contented herself with a meal of jam and dairy produce. I think she ate nothing at all on Good Friday ; she said that even the birds abstained from food that day. There was a feeling of suspense about all nature. I found distraction in the long hours spent in the mild atmosphere of the garden ; the sound of the wind in the trees, the scent of the grass, the sticky sheaths of the buds, the twitter of sparrows, the delicate powdering of blossom on hedges and apple-trees, were pleasure and entertainment enough for me. The mass of bloom in the orchard perfumed the air with almond and honey ; butterflies, bumble-bees, and bright-coloured insects, flitted from flower to flower. I was ready and eager to let my joy break forth.

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My mother arrived on Easter Eve, and brought my father's excuses. He was unable to leave town. My awakening next morning was delirious with bliss. My mother's tender embrace, the carolling of bells, the exhilaration of the morning air on the way to early Mass in the neighbouring village, all contributed to the day's delight. My mother and aunt received Holy Communion side by side, kneeling at the altar-rails, while I watched the sun stain the East window with crimson and gold. We came out of church amidst a throng of happy faces and babbling voices. We congratulated each other on the lovely weather; the poor received alms, and the snow of the apple-trees seemed to have flown upward to add to the glory of the sky! . . . "Christ is risen!" said my mother to me, and I echoed the salutation, throwing my arms about her neck. Her expression, usually so troubled, was serene. Rows of young wheat sprouted between the ridges of rich brown earth. She murmured, "This

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glorious weather fills one with content!" I wanted to run and shout for the mere joy of being alive.

Later in the day I went to the College to fetch Charlot. I found him in the playground with a master of the Senior division. He and Ravet were playing together. The croquet-ground was deserted; the hoops stood rusting, the mallets lay on the ground, the football was lodged in a tree, and the master was reading. He allowed Charlot to run up and change his clothes at once. Ravet consented to talk while I waited, then watched us depart, with his raw knuckles stuffed into his pockets. It did not occur to me to ask him to come too.

My mother left us very soon, but promised to return, and perhaps to bring my father with her. Her departure left me solitary. I found myself thinking without any of the old shrinking, of the bustle of the playground, the rough shoving of the boys, the occasional kick at the football when it came one's way,

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one's surprise at being suddenly seized by the shoulders and used as a buffer between two players, and Rupert's favourite game of threatening the little ones with a ball until he caught them off their guard, and then quickly hurling it, striking them in a vulnerable spot. What an atmosphere of turbulence he would have introduced into our quiet garden ! He would probably have climbed the trees, and wounded young sparrows with his catapult. Charlot was only interested in following insects about on all-fours, and collecting snails. Still, I did not fail to fetch him often, although even the few minutes I had to spend waiting in the deserted building depressed me. The sound of scales reached me, played by some master trying to kill time ; I would hear a gardener digging in the kitchen garden, a servant whistling in the empty rooms. I hurried Charlot away as soon as possible. He told me Ravet was instituting a systematic search through all our lockers, and was a dreadful tease at night,

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after the master, thinking the boys were asleep, had retired to his room.

The days slipped by agreeably, in mild weather under cloudless skies. I enjoyed the peace and inaction, loved the fresh mornings, and the mellow afternoons when no sound was heard but the heavy flop of the chestnut blooms as they fell to earth. I sat on a bench, my thoughts roaming far from my book, while I crumbled my lunch to attract a brood of tiny chicks, and the mother-hen pecked at the bright eyelet-holes of my laced shoes. The evenings grew so fine that my aunt came out with me on the terrace one night after dinner ; a soft light outlined the roof of the barn, and presently the moon rose from behind it, serene and majestic. It sailed slowly behind a mass of cloudlets, which took on the appearance of hills and valleys. My aunt thought she could descry the figure of a man carrying a load of wood, but Terrouet had convinced me that the moon was uninhabited ; he had

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a bet with Béreng that it was as dead as the earth would some day be, and M. Laurin had borne out the correctness of his statement. The atmosphere freshened ; we returned to the house and went to our rooms. My old night terrors awoke to life, and I caught myself thinking regretfully of the night-light, the protecting alcove, and the companionship of the school dormitory. ' .

III

WE returned to school. There were green leaves on the trees of the playground, tiny things that scarce cast a shadow on the ground beneath. The great elms which had previously been covered with a soft purple moss, and then decked with thousands of green sequins, now shed showers of little scales. The gardeners swept them up daily after five o'clock. We could hear their brooms, and the quarrels of the sparrows, through the open windows. The weather had become much hotter. We played in shirt-sleeves, and quickly became flushed and overheated. Some of us gathered in groups under the trees to read, or show each other the stamps we had collected during

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the holidays. Nearly every one had come back with new clothes ; Méjean had a smart grey tweed suit and a straw hat ; Rupert, a drill jacket and trousers ; Béreng had pretty neckties, but he soon exchanged them for a pocket-knife of Calvat's. The boys took into wear the thin underclothing provided by their parents for the summer, at once ; the playground looked quite festive, but the day-boarders were still distinguished by whiter collars and better blacked boots.

There was a new boy in our division. He was twelve years old, extraordinarily handsome, but so dull of expression that his countenance was thereby deprived of charm. He was, as I had been, stared at with much curiosity at first, but his complete indifference soon freed him from the attentions of his schoolfellows. At recreations, he stood with his back against a tree, or sat on the step of a classroom, gazing vacantly into space, with his hands resting palms upwards on the ground beside him. M. Laurin desired me

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to give my desk up to him, and relegated me to the other end of the room among the boys of the fifth class. I sat between Mouque and a little table occupied only by Rupert. Charlot begged for permission to move with me, but was refused. He told me in the evening at supper that his new neighbour, whose name was Daunis, had lent him some golden ink to write his name on his copy-books. They had both painted their nails with it. I was delighted with my new place. When Mouque's exercises were finished, he did my sums for me. He worked in large round spectacles, on account of some defect in his vision; when I spoke to him he looked at me over the top of his glasses, which gave him a certain air of maturity that rather intimidated me. He took pains to warn me at once that I need not suppose I had been promoted because I was allowed to sit beside him. He said I still belonged to the sixth class. Rupert was very slow over his work; he used to gnaw

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the end of his penholder, and wipe it on the tablecloth like a paint-brush. He wrote very little, but quickly. He did fairly well on the whole, but when he encountered any difficulty he always sent a little note to Mouque to ask for help. The latter would shrug his shoulders and say he had no time to bother about other fellows ; but presently relented and gave the required information, vowing each time that he would never do so again. As I sat between the two, all the messages had to pass through me. Rupert coughed gently and threw a folded paper under my chair ; I grovelled for it and handed it to my neighbour, who pretended not to see it ; when the answer was ready I leant forward and was careful to place it conveniently on Rupert's table, but he never thanked me by so much as a glance. Sometimes he ordered me to tell Mouque he wished to speak to him, and they conversed above my bent head. One day I saw Calvat, who was picking up the pieces of wastepaper

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as usual, pinch him viciously in the calf. Rupert did not cry out, as Calvat had hoped ; he merely kicked him over, and pulled up his leg to stroke it, without even looking up from his book.

Rupert was also my neighbour in the dormitory. Every evening I watched him, at the given signal, walk over to his bed and begin to undress. He threw off his coat and soft shirt, and kneaded his bare back and chest. I was surprised at his not wearing flannel, but when I made a remark about it, he said he left that sort of thing to women, so that I felt ashamed of my warm vest with long sleeves. Even before Easter he had asked leave to wash himself down to the waist at night ; but M. Laurin would not allow it, so he had to content himself with perfunctory massage and physical exercises, which were quickly imitated by Méjean, Mouque, and Béreng, and as quickly prohibited by the master. When he had pulled on his night-shirt, he jumped into bed, dis-

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posed himself with his face towards me to avoid the light, and fell asleep at once. Meanwhile, I progressed but slowly with my undressing; I had not yet learnt the trick of pulling off knickerbockers, pants, and stockings all in one.

At six in the morning the prolonged ringing of the school bell was the signal for our rising. A few minutes before, M. Laurin issued from his alcove, whence we had previously heard him performing his ablutions, and walked up and down the dormitory. Habit, the dawning light, and the final round of the night watchman, had awakened us all by this time. The master rapped three times on a table when the bell started, and we bounded out of bed, put on our breeches, and ran to the row of basins. As there were not enough for everybody, those who dawdled had to wait their turn, shivering. I was always one of the latter, and used to spend the interval staring through the steamy windows at the light dawning in the sky, turning to iridescent

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beads the innumerable drops of moisture on the glass. We yawned in the oppressive atmosphere, and although the master kept strict watch, many of the boys made but scant use of the soap and cold water. Some, however, washed so thoroughly as to prevent others having time to do so. Béreng, Méjean, Terrouet, although they had been punished for the practice times without number, turned the taps on so hard that the water spurted upwards, and they were able to rub their faces with both hands under the flowing stream. Rupert used to pull on his breeches under cover of the bedclothes, so that at the signal he could spring out and secure a basin ; then, standing with his shirt thrown open at the neck and his sleeves turned up, he covered his head, face, neck, and arms, with a thick lather of soap, which left its scent on his skin and hair for the rest of the day. The elder Charlot hated cold water ; his little brother scrubbed his face vigorously, squeezing up his eyes and mouth to prevent the soap get-

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ting into them. Calvat was careless and dilatory, and Ravet simply dipped his towel in water, and hung it on the rod at the foot of his bed. Many merely did what was rendered necessary by the watchful eye of the master. We discovered the very first day that the new boy would willingly have evaded washing ; he had to be pulled out of bed, and was such a hopeless dawdle that M. Laurin was obliged to let him remain after the others to finish dressing. He wore long hair, as soft and fine as a girl's. He woke the first night, crying for his mother.

The weather was becoming so warm that the door of our classroom, which faced the afternoon sun, was no longer kept closed after luncheon. I had an uninterrupted view from my seat of the empty playground, where the sparrows took dust-baths and darted after

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each other, and the leaves dropped slowly from the big trees. Sometimes I could hear the tiny boys in the Infants' division droning their lessons in unison, guided by raps from the mistress's ruler—

*L'en-fant mé-chant
L'é-tang char-mant,
Luce—Russe—Puce. . . .*

—or a little song they repeated so often that I could have sung it in my sleep at last—

*Vole, vole, petite mouche,
Sur ma main ne te pose pas ;
Car si par malheur je te touche,
Je le crains, tu périras.
Un méfait cruel
Offense le ciel. . . .*

They were practically babies in that division, with frilled collars and hair tied up with ribbon. They had their recreation at separate times from ours.

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Maps, coloured prints representing the different races of the world, and botanical pictures, hung upon our walls. There was also a representation of the death of Chramne, son of Clotaire, whose name I never could find in my history book. In the first weeks of my life at school these were quite sufficient to distract my attention from lessons, and to set me dreaming idly about the "Mer Australe," or the "Cordillère des Andes"; but now that the sun shone, I preferred to watch the slow swaying of the branches, and imagine the river and fields lying beyond the boundary wall which was just visible over the top of the kitchen-garden hedge.

Although the classroom was large and lofty and the heat of the day was over by five o'clock, M. Laurin used to leave one of the doors open, even in the evening, but one day the Headmaster came through on a visit of inspection and ordered it to be shut. We hardly ever saw the great man except on these occasions. He used to come in unex-

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pectedly, and throw a searching glance round, to see how we were behaving. The instant we caught sight of him we all bent over our desks, furtively concealing a forbidden book, or slipping a letter into a copy-book. With hardly a perceptible movement complete order was established, yet not quickly enough to deceive the eagle eye of the Head, who instantly spotted anything wrong, or perceived the blush on a guilty cheek. He perambulated slowly round the room, pointed to some boy sitting in a bad position, or opened a locker, which was always sure to be the untidiest in the room, and went out, bowing to the attentive master. A sigh of relief signalled his departure.

In comparison to this visitation, the much more frequent appearances of the General Superintendent left us cold. His office stood within sight of all; he showed himself at the slightest unusual sound in the playground; he was present when we filed into the classrooms or refectory, and often

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visited the dormitories. We knew him almost as well as our own ushers. But an interview with the Headmaster was an awe-inspiring affair. There were two entrances to his room, one of which was padded, so that no sound could escape beyond it. When a lecture from the Superintendent failed to effect an improvement in the conduct of some pupil who had been reported by his master, the contumacious one was summoned into the presence of the dreaded authority ; from this ordeal he would issue in tears, and we could never find out what had happened. The tense silence which usually followed upon such an event was broken only by the gasping sobs of the delinquent. Sometimes the Headmaster walked through the dormitory at night, waking a snoring boy here or there, much to the startled amazement of the latter. The news was passed from bed to bed in the morning, and finally some one bolder than the rest ventured to tell the master. He

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would then exhort us to be always on our best behaviour. On winter evenings, when we went out, we could see the window of the Headmaster's office ; his long, thin shadow bending over book or writing was outlined on the blind. At sight of it, voices were lowered and footsteps hushed.

One day a rumour ran through the school that the master of the Middle division had himself been haled before the dreaded presence. Groups of boys gathered outside to see him come out, but unluckily the school bell rang and lessons had to begin. The Superintendent took the absent master's division. When the latter came back to his class his countenance was flushed, and he walked absently up and down his platform for a long time. He scribbled off a letter, but tore it up at once. The pupils he had treated so despotically giggled among themselves and made a hissing sound, indicative of hostility. He lost his temper. We heard him storm at the ringleader and turn

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him out of the room. Presently the Superintendent brought the boy in to us. Two days later the master left after morning school, and a new man took his place at ten o'clock. We heard through one of the day-boarders that he had been concerned in a row at a café in the town ; it was also said that he smoked when walking out with his division, and got up too late in the morning.

My mother's letters were as affectionate as ever, but they gradually became graver in tone, and she no longer referred to her intention of coming to the farm with my father. My longing for the holidays, which had been momentarily stayed, woke into fresh life ; I felt alone in a crowd. I used to envy Florent and Mouque, who walked about everywhere together, and sat down to read out of the same book, their heads

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almost touching, as they waited for each other at the bottom of the page. Béreng and Terrouet were inseparable, although they quarrelled constantly. The five day-boarders shared the goodies they brought from home for lunch, and the same faults were to be found in all their exercises. The link between Calvat and Ravet offered peculiar points. They were always interchanging small objects, which they hastily concealed when anybody looked at them, and the chink of money could occasionally be heard in their hands. Rupert was the only one among us who seemed to feel no need of a friend; he treated his adoring satellite, Méjean, with complete indifference, and would probably not have put himself out for him in any way, beyond protecting him from violence. He was completely engrossed in games, and seemed to care for nothing but his football. It amused him to butt in between two chums talking to each other, and knock their heads together with

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his strong hands. He made himself pleasant only to the Seniors, whose ranks he longed to join; in his own division he discouraged all advances. I should have loved to have him for a friend. I had a feeling that he did not even see me.

One day a sudden shower sent us scampering to take shelter under the pent roof of a shed. We kicked up so much dust running about in the confined space that the masters tried to keep us quiet. Their voices were scarcely audible amidst the tumult, but Rupert placed his services at their disposal, formed us all up in a row, and forbade us to move. A few disobeyed and stepped out of the line, but he pushed them back, and promised to cuff the head of the first who stirred. I took a step to the front. He gave me a big smack in the face and passed on. I fell back into my place more grieved than angry.

Another time it chanced that my class had the same composition as the fifth. I saw

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- Rupert thinking hard about the subject, so I set to work with affected energy. I managed to attract his attention. The story was that of a pointsman whose duty compelled him to turn the train on to the line where his little child was playing. When I had filled my four pages, I handed them to Rupert and asked what he thought of them. He read them over carefully. The next day the professor came to the classroom, saw that our seats were next to each other, nodded his head, and pointed out to the master the similarity of our two compositions. I was accused of having copied Rupert's. The latter flushed, but said nothing, and the master merely supposed he was afraid of being punished for having helped me. Alas, the following Sunday I was not allowed to go to La Grangère!

I had to walk with the others. The road was white with dust; there were no trees, and the broiling sun beat down in full force on the shadeless expanse. The only pro-

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tection afforded was that of a high bank bordering the side of the road. I did my best to keep within its narrow limits. I was not unhappy ; I had no regret for what had happened ; on the contrary, I was borne up by a kind of elation I would not willingly have bartered for the calm repose of the farm. My schoolfellows trod heavily, hands in pockets, and handkerchiefs tucked under their caps to shelter their necks. Whenever they could elude observation they dawdled behind to pick cherries or green fruit from the orchards we passed. Charlot collected insects in a cardboard box ventilated with pin-holes. Sometimes he showed me a special find. Suddenly Rupert ranged up alongside of me. He looked very hot, and had taken off his waistcoat and hung it over his shoulders. He pushed his arm within mine, and we walked some way without speaking. We passed a vineyard where stood a cherry tree so laden with fruit that a lot of the boys stopped and eyed it longingly ; but the master

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bade them walk on. Rupert asked whether I was thirsty and without waiting for my answer knelt down as if to tie up his shoelace, allowed the others, including the master, to pass him, sprang over the low hedge, and disappeared among the vines. He rejoined me at a turn of the road, appearing suddenly from behind a tree. He said nothing for a moment or two, but presently pulled a handful of cherries from his pocket and put them into mine. We ate them furtively. Ravet was the only one whose suspicions had been aroused. He came circling round us, and Rupert was forced to buy his silence. He remained by my side throughout the walk ; the time passed all too quickly for me.

I was confident that I had at last won my schoolfellow's regard, and I did not grudge the price paid for it. I pondered happily on the pleasure his friendship promised to bring into my life, and was quite surprised when, on being sent for to the parlour, I found Justin, who had come from my aunt to

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inquire how I had borne my punishment. I was perfectly serene, and he went away reassured. When I went back to the schoolroom, Rupert's head was buried in a book. I tried in vain to attract his attention. Afterwards at supper I let Ravet and Calvat have my share—I only ate a little fruit. I saw Rupert had forgotten all about me. He pretended not to see me when we went up to bed. I walked slowly up the staircase with Daunis, who was always last. As we entered the dormitory I tripped and caught at his shoulder to save myself from falling; this brought my face close to his, and on a sudden impulse I threw my arms round his neck and kissed him.

The new master found great difficulty in maintaining order in his classroom. The boys speedily discovered that his severity was only a cloak assumed to conceal his agonised

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shyness. Videux, who was celebrated in the Middle division for self-assertion and coolness, used to amuse himself by staring until he forced the unfortunate young man to turn away his eyes ; he also agitated him by pretending to conceal something behind a screen of books ; in fact he spared him none of the traditional annoyances. We heard all about 'it from the elder Charlot, who retailed the fun to a group of us in the playground. The new master had a very long nose ; he found this unfortunate feature reproduced in chalk everywhere, even on the sacred precincts of the platform ; the boys also called attention to it by blowing their own noses incessantly. He blushed easily, and when put out of countenance hung his head ; the whole of the class would then imitate him. He had very little self-control, and Videux could drive him half crazy by feigning deafness when addressed by him ; once he even brushed past him in the doorway and trod on his foot. The master

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refrained with difficulty from striking him. The division was enjoying itself hugely. Sounds of laughter and shouting penetrated oftener than ever through the partition. When the uproar began M. Laurin would cast an anxious glance at his own pupils. The spirit of mischief gained upon us ; Ravet beat time with a ruler, and we all felt strongly inclined to follow the example of our seniors. One boy, who had hitherto behaved in an exemplary manner, began to show off. One evening he put his cap on his head, tied some string reins to his desk, and pretended to drive a fiery team. M. Laurin was taken aback at first, but then, noting the hostile look in his eye, went over to him. To the master's remonstrance the boy, who was called Fortin, replied that he was bored and must do something to amuse himself. M. Laurin looked at the exercise he had finished and gave him leave to read, although it was not yet time to do so. The next day he repeated his bad conduct, and the permission

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to read did nothing to disarm him. Threats of expulsion were also useless. The division was thrilled at the prospect of a row, and at last, when Fortin made us all laugh, the master's patience gave way and he ordered him to leave the room. He walked out with an impertinent attempt at swagger, bearing in his hand a note addressed to the Superintendent. We saw nothing more of him for the rest of the day. In the evening we found him in bed; his supper had been sent up to him. He behaved better for the next few days, but he knew we were counting upon him.

M. Laurin was working hard for his degree. The examination was to take place shortly, and he began to show signs of strain. The forbearance he had exercised in his management of the division had exhausted him. He was still discreet in his dealings with Fortin, but would brook no nonsense from the little ones. One of the latter, whose place was near the platform, had an exasperating trick of giggling. He was a day-boarder of the

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Infant class, pale, with almost colourless hair and eyes. When called to order, he bent over his task, stuck out his tongue, and moved his whole body in unison with his hand and arm, but the slightest movement or cough anywhere distracted his attention, and with his penholder between his teeth he would sit and grin, to the great annoyance of M. Laurin, who gave him long impositions. Yet the child was not wanting in concentration. I once saw him watch a fly on his desk so closely that M. Laurin had to speak to him twice, and finally give a sharp rap of the ruler on the table to recall him to his duty. Even the more sensible boys manifested symptoms of stress. These showed themselves chiefly in the extra vigour the active ones put into football and prisoner's base, while the others found relief in lazing about on the chapel steps. Terrouet organised a "man-hunt," inspired by his books of adventure. The Seniors played no games, but propped their elbows on the railing which separated their

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playground from ours, and made efforts to engage us in conversation, regardless of the severe punishments entailed by this breach of the rules. Their master feigned not to notice them, but ours prevented us from answering, by gathering about him all those he found on the boundary-line. The Seniors dubbed him "Socrates," probably because of the long cloak he wore with one end flung over his shoulder. Videux, pale, hollow-chested, and snub-nosed, called him "the Jesuit," and Béreng even ventured to write the word in the sand when M. Laurin was about to pass.

The evenings were growing mild. A graceful acacia hemmed in between the elms was covered with white blossom.

Daunis's handsome face attracted every one's regard, but his indifference rendered any attempt at friendship abortive. He used to

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find notes from the Seniors concealed in his books ; he read them on the sly, with his head hidden behind the cover of his big atlas, smiled, but made no attempt to answer them, although Courtot, who sat behind him, urged him to do so. Courtot had the voice and manners of a little girl. He used to make great efforts to obtain notice from the Seniors, but without much result ; consequently he was deeply interested in Daunis's correspondence with them. He even ventured to answer several of the letters on behalf of his friend, in the gold ink belonging to the latter. Courtot had more success with Béreng, who used to write verses to him ; they were always shown round at once, by both author and recipient. I copied a few. Some, like the following, were entitled *Rêverie*, and said to be " unfinished "—

*C'était par une nuit sereine et sans étoile,
Sur l'Océan, on ne voyait aucune voile ;
Parfois, le cri d'une mouette, rauque et rude,
Réveillait les échos de cette solitude, . . .*

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Others were more didactic—

*Ces vers, à l'un de mes amis je les dédie,
Afin qu'il apprenne ce que la calomnie,
Entre camarades, peut causer de ravages. . . .
Surtout ne l'oublie pas, car c'est un conseil sage.*

Courtot did not follow the sensible advice given in the above lines. He was far too fond of gossiping and even slandering. This propensity gained him the nickname of "the portress." Daunis, lymphatic and fair of skin, was called "bread-and-milk," a name that stuck to him for a long time. He was so devoted to drawing that he neglected his lessons to practise the art ; his exercise-books were filled with sketches, and all the pictures in his history book were coloured with chalks. He spent the whole of his recreation-time drawing. It was the only thing I ever saw him take any interest in. When he was absorbed in this amusement he looked extraordinarily handsome ; his eyes brightened and his lips relaxed into a smile ; his upper

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lip was so faultlessly modelled that it reminded me of the outspread wings of an angel, and I imagined him to be gifted with all the qualities I myself lacked. One afternoon he stayed in after the others to draw a caricature of me on the blackboard: he did the face in profile, but the eye was placed as if full-face, with a tiny pupil in one corner. It was instantly recognised when we came in, and Courtot rushed to the board, scribbled "Portrait of Gilles" underneath it, and signed it with the artist's nickname. M. Laurin burst out laughing when he saw it, and marvelled at the likeness.

The same day I found some flowers in my locker and was pleased and thrilled, but I soon guessed the name of the donor when I saw Charlot smiling and signing to me that he had nothing to do with the gift.

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The hot days of June trailed their slow length along. The reluctant dusk faded unwillingly from the playground where we now had a late recreation after supper, the duration of which depended upon the light. This last playhour of the day was never noisy. Some of the boys collected the blossoms fallen from the acacia tree, and sucked the sweet pistils or sniffed appreciatively at the scented heaps in their hands; others sat or lay about the steps, talking; a few, more active than the rest, wandered about like unquiet spirits seeking some mischief to do. One evening they hit upon the plan of setting fire to a lot of waste paper they had crammed into the inside of a hollow elm tree. Ravet furnished matches and Rupert applied them. M. Laurin was some distance away and did not notice what they were about, but Charlot ran to him in a fright and reported what was going on.

All the fellows decided that the informer should be sent to Coventry. I was cautioned

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not to speak to him. The punishment did not seem to promise much success, as Charlot did not play games ; but the next day, every group melted at his approach, and presently the whole school hissed him. Charlot, with his shoulders hunched against the railings and his hands in his pockets, grinned sheepishly and mumbled, " I don't care. . . ." His tumbled blouse hung straight from his neck. His brother was not sparing of reproaches. I was alone at the end of the playground. Charlot came towards me, but all the boys followed, and his embarrassment was palpable. I watched him advance haltingly, smiling rather wistfully. . . . I moved away. When I ventured to look round, Charlot was still reiterating, " I don't care . . . I don't care . . . " but his lips were quivering. M. Laurin interposed on his behalf.

At the following recreations the persecution was kept up in a modified form. The little fellow was left religiously alone and not spoken to by anybody. He pretended to be

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indifferent, and played quietly in a corner with his marbles; in the evening he picked up acacia blossoms and sat apart sorting them in his pinafore, but two boys of the Middle division, pretending to chase each other, stumbled over him purposely and scattered his collection. The pangs of remorse began to assail me. In the dormitory, after the lights were out; I heard muffled sobs. I got up and went over to Charlot's bed. He was crying bitterly, with his head stuffed under the pillow to stifle the sound. I leant over him and uncovered his face gently, but he gave me an angry glance from his suffused eyes, and turning his back upon me, exclaimed peremptorily, "Get away!" I desisted.

For two days more he bore his ostracism. Daunis was the only one who spoke to him, and I would gladly have done so, but he would not allow me to go near him. The third day he was taken ill at morning school and sent up to bed. In the evening he was transferred to the Infirmary. My remorse

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became so acute that I could think of nothing else. I seized my chance during the noise and bustle of an afternoon recreation, and ran to the Infirmary. With a beating heart I pushed open the door; the noise I made startled a black object, which bounded from the bed and ran out between my legs. "Oh, you have frightened the cat away!" the little patient exclaimed, and begged me to leave the door open so that it might come back again. He was in no pain, but was so exhausted that he felt as if he had not a bone in his whole body. He amused himself by drawing landscapes with coloured chalks. He gave me one; it represented a great red sun decorated with innumerable rays. I told him I had escaped from the playground to pay him a visit. He smiled as he listened, but seemed quite indifferent to this mark of a friendship I had withheld from him at the critical moment. He was perfectly content. The matron showed him every kindness; he had plenty of books, and the cat kept him

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company. "What! the blind cat?" I cried in astonishment. I wondered how he had managed to tame it. The animal was called so because it had a wall-eye and the other was half closed. We sometimes caught sight of it scampering away when we entered the dormitory or the refectory. The boys tried to kick it, but could never catch it; they called it "dirty, beast," and said it was not so blind as it pretended. Nobody could boast of ever having touched it. Charlot told me he had been awakened by a nightmare the first night he was in the Infirmary, and had found the cat lying on his chest. He pushed it away, but it returned shortly after and lay at his feet. Since then it had constantly been with him. Presently I saw it, crouching at the other end of the apartment, watching us. I remembered tales I had heard of little children being suffocated by cats, and of foul animals, bred in hot countries, that sucked the blood of sleepers, and I begged Charlot to be careful. He was,

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however, evidently longing for me to go ; he looked invitingly at the cat, and made little coaxing sounds at her. She started when I rose, but did not run away.

The drawn blinds diffused a golden light. When I drew them aside I saw the distant landscape gleaming under the sun. I thought I recognised the red roof of La Grangère among the trees, and the sight gave me a pang. Charlot had already resumed his book ; the cat nestled close to his side, purring in the warmth of the coverlet. I hesitated to disturb them again and walked out quietly, carrying the drawing under my arm.

Ever since my first week at the College I had been in the special Catechism class and had worked my best with the chaplain, a kindly old man who gave us instructions twice a week. We saw him no more, how-

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ever, when the time for the First Communions drew near. He had entire charge of the boys who were preparing for that event. There were about ten, all in my class; among them were Florent, Gernon, Mouque, Terrouet, and some day-boarders. The week before the day fixed for the Feast they left the classroom and spent their whole time with the chaplain. They were greatly envied by the rest of the school. Their meals were served separately, and they played in the garden under the supervision of the chaplain, who readily joined in their games. Often he would take them with him to the house of one of his relations who had a charming property in the neighbourhood; there they lunched and played croquet. They only rejoined us at the evening recreation; but even then they remained grouped together, and took a pride in their isolation and the observation they attracted. They were careful to maintain their gravity and to treat any attempt to

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approach them with haughty frigidity. I did not venture to go near them; they seemed set apart and crowned with a distinction I envied.

A choir was specially trained for the great occasion. I was enrolled in it, as were several of the younger boys of my class. Charlot, who was back in his place in school, was remarkable among us all for the beauty of his singing. When he sang in chapel his lovely clear voice seemed to soar far above us, echoing melodiously among the rafters. He delighted in practising, and hummed the air of the solo entrusted to him incessantly. His short illness had had the effect of releasing him from Coventry, but now it was he who preferred to be alone, and who affected to disdain his schoolfellows. I hardly dared to speak to him, but I listened with rapture when his flute-like voice rose pure and ringing above the droning accompaniment of the harmonium.

On the morning of the great day, the

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playground was early filled with a well-dressed crowd. The mothers were distinguished by the smartness of their dresses ; the sisters, in light frocks and carefully curled locks, pressed close to their brothers, in the fear of being overlooked. The Communicants had remained behind in the dormitory, and filed into the chapel last of all. They held rosaries in their clasped hands and wore a bow of white satin on the left arm ; their demeanour was so grave that they passed as strangers through our staring ranks. Gernon, who, it was said, had talked in his sleep the night before, walked with his light-coloured eyes gazing straight before him, apparently seeing nothing, but Terrouet blushed and looked self-conscious, although his heavy black lashes drooped modestly upon his cheeks ; one could see that he still belonged to this earth, whereas Gernon's spirit was far away. Charlot stared vacantly with bent head and hands crossed upon his knees. The chaplain gave a final exhortation to

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those whom he called his children ; he discoursed of the celestial gardens of which they were on this great day the spotless flowers, and of the Lord who was about to enter their hearts. The mothers knelt, each behind her own son. When the priest descended from the altar to administer the Sacred Host I noticed that one of them was weeping. This turned my mind so suddenly and so engrossingly towards my own dear mother that the tears rushed to my eyes and rolled unheeded down my cheeks. My schoolfellows gazed open-mouthed at me and I was soon obliged to wipe them away, for we had to head the procession out of church. The families followed and carried off our schoolfellows, of whom we saw nothing more that morning.

Everybody came back to vespers. To my great surprise my aunt arrived ; she was anxious to hear the choir I had told her so much about. After the ceremony, the First Communicants joined us at last, and gave us sacred pictures, signed with their names.

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Mouque gave me one of a chalice festooned with flowers ; others represented angels or holy subjects ; Gernon's bore in golden letters the words : "*Heaven is in my heart.*" I examined them all thoughtfully. The playground was filled with the buzz of conversation and laughter ; the Headmaster unbent graciously towards grateful parents. The crowd melted away gradually, each group bearing a Communicant in its centre.

We stood at the further end of the playground under the preoccupied supervision of a master, watching the merrymaking, and discussing it among ourselves. I was depressed ; I felt shut out, left at the gates of a beautiful country where others had been admitted ; the pictures I held seemed to me the tokens of joys I was unworthy to share.

The nights were becoming hot. The big boys begged M. Laurin to leave the windows

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open after we were in bed. He refused at first, but relented later, on condition that we maintained perfect silence.

Lamps were no longer needed. A subdued light filtered in through the great windows. We lay quiet, enjoying the gradual lifting of the atmosphere, and the freshness pervading the air of the room. From my bed I could see a strip of pale sky which gradually darkened until at last the stars pierced through. The first was tiny and twinkled intermittently, so that I could not determine with certainty whether it was really there ; but presently it would grow fixed, and others grouped themselves around it. One there was, more brilliant than the rest, whose name I longed to know. My mother had taught me to recognise the Big and Little Bear, Orion and the Pleiades, but they were probably higher in the heavens, for I never saw them, but I was quite content with my star ; it seemed to belong specially to me and to say : " I am shining

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for you—only for you!” If I half closed my eyes, I pictured one long ray touching my lids; I almost thought I could seize it with my hands. I christened it “The Little Bee,” and used to roll my head about on the pillow and pretend it was dancing for me. I talked to it, told it my troubles, and gave it messages to the *Bon Dieu* above, till gradually it passed beyond the sphere of the window. Those that followed did not replace it in my affections.

Delicious scents were borne into the room on the cool breeze. I could distinguish the aroma of the flowering limes bordering the streets, and that of a garden full of honeysuckle across the way; sometimes there was the earthy smell of watered soil. M. Laurin used to lean with his head out until we had all fallen asleep and it was time to close up. It soon became unnecessary to petition for open windows; the heat became so oppressive that it would have been cruel to deprive us of ventilation. Thenceforward our good

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behaviour deteriorated. We burst out laughing when we heard the passers-by singing or talking ; the master had to return to restore order. Every evening a rustle of footsteps and fluty voices announced the passing of a school of little girls whom their mistresses brought back from their walk at nightfall. At the sound we coughed significantly, for a fairy-tale had run through the dormitory to the effect that M. Laurin was over-fond of watching them. Once when we did this he shut everything up to punish us, and although we grumbled long and loud we had to go to sleep without the windows being reopened. After that he never looked out until we were all asleep. When the room was finally shut up, he sat down to work in his small alcove by the light of a small lamp, but he had to discontinue the practice because one of the small boys complained that the light prevented him from sleeping. He therefore remained gazing absently from the casement nearest to his alcove ; those who

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woke up pretended he was there all night ; I myself surprised him once at early dawn, and the fable was circulated that he never slept.

One morning after a very hot night, I felt so exhausted that I begged to be allowed to stay in bed. I remained alone in the deserted dormitory weighed down by a heavy torpor. Every now and then I opened my eyes for an instant and glanced at the woolly clouds sailing in the crude blue of the sky. Towards noon I woke to the fact that my luncheon was on a tray by my side, and the white cat watching me from Rupert's bed. I was not a bit hungry, and willingly shared the food with her. She reminded me of Charlot's illness. I did not dare sleep again. Presently she ventured nearer and let me caress her harsh fur. She was very nervous, and wriggled under my hand, biting it gently and holding it with claws half unsheathed. For fun I rubbed her fur the wrong way ; I felt my fingers tingle ; she spat, bounded up

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and disappeared. Soon after, the sky clouded over; the long room grew dark, and rain lashed the windows, while a distant growling betokened a storm. It came up rapidly, and presently the house rocked under the claps of thunder and the swish of torrential rain. I cowered under the bedclothes, but the lightning penetrated this shelter, and each new roar of the thunder echoed in my heart. I would have fled, had I not been afraid to run through the long dormitory with its eight windows illumined by the flashes. One terrible explosion made me think the roof was falling in, and left me half dead with fright. But gradually the tumult decreased; muffled grumblings receded into the distance, but still the rain rustled like the flow of a river. I remained oppressed and feverish; dusk fell early, and with it my fears returned. I would have given much for even the presence of the cat, but no one came, and I lay rigid, with my head under the coverings, longing for the hour of bedtime. Relief

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only came with the return of my comrades. Rupert leant over me to ask if I had heard the thunder, and told me the lightning had struck a tree in the playground. . . . I hardly know which emotion touched me most—fright at the catastrophe or delight at his condescension. At last I fell asleep in spite of the hum of mosquitoes around my head.

The next day I persuaded myself I had fully recovered my normal health, for I dreaded nothing so much as another solitary day. Also I wanted to see the fallen tree. The Seniors were surrounding it when we went down, and as it lay in their playground we had to content ourselves with staring at it across the railing. The wind had flung it on to the boundary wall, which had crumbled under its weight. A semicircular breach

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allowed us to peep through the thick leafage of a lime, into a large garden usually concealed from view by swaying branches above the wall. We were filled with a wild curiosity to look through the breach. I could not resist when, two days later, the tree having been sold and removed, the neighbouring park became visible. During afternoon school I pretended to be obliged to leave the room, and when I had obtained leave, I ran to the wall. I could not be seen from any window of the house. I crept towards it on tiptoe and pushed my head through the opening. A path lay before me which presently lost itself among heavy shadows; some branches swung lazily in the breeze; a pine tree shot straight upward, its horizontal boughs seeming to wave invisible forms aside. At its foot, close to the pathway, great waxen blossoms, bigger than a bird, reared their crests between stiff leaves shaped like the blades of a sword. Presently a white form appeared, bending here and there

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as if dancing : a moment later I was able to distinguish a lady in a light gown plucking flowers. I watched until she drew quite near. As she rose she caught sight of me ; her arms were full of long stalks. Coming closer, she picked one of the white blossoms and held it out to me with a smile. When I realised that she was no wraith, but a living person, I grew so shy that I fled without a word, carrying with me the flower, which I had never seen before, and which I afterwards learnt was called an iris. A delicate scent came from the three curved petals ; the veining of the others was hairy like a caterpillar. I broke off the stalk, hid the flower in my pocket, and returned to the classroom, where I ruminated long over the strange way the gift had reached me. At evening study I laid it on my table, between two books that effectually concealed it from the master's view, to feast upon its beauty. It quickly became an object of curiosity to the others, and, under one pretext or another, every boy

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got up and came to have a look. In answer to Courtot's questions I said it had been propagated from a rare tropical plant, and that my aunt's gardens were full of it. But to Rupert I confided the true story, though I pretended I had picked it myself in the mysterious garden. He promptly asked leave to go out, and when to my surprise he returned empty handed, he whispered that he had only wanted to make certain where the flowers grew, because he intended to go in the night and pick them all.

When we got to bed I fought my inclination to sleep in order to watch Rupert, whom I longed to accompany in his audacious expedition ; but he was, as usual, one of the first to fall asleep, and I was not able to keep awake long. I opened my eyes in the middle of the night and looked over at his bed. It seemed to be empty, and I did not doubt that Rupert had gone, so I hastily jumped up and huddled on my clothes to join him. The big door at the end of the room was the only one

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locked at night ; the one giving access to the staircase was left open, and it was easy to reach the playground by way of it. I was soon outside. The thick branches of the elms slumbered under a starry sky and a crescent moon. I ran from tree to tree, sheltering in the shadows, and quickly reached the breach in the wall and looked over. There was nothing stirring. I called Rupert's name gently, and presently ventured to scramble across the crumbling stones. I found myself on damp grass which wet my bare feet through my thin shoes. I crept cautiously along the path. It resembled a clear river, under the white light of the moon. Beyond it the pine tree stood like a sentinel guarding the mysterious vastness of the park. The flowers had not been plucked, so I decided that Rupert must be wandering among the trees, and lost not a moment in following after him. I was at once engulfed into black darkness. Trees surrounded me on every side and veiled the light of the stars from my sight. A wav-

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ing bough tapped me on the arm. A white form appeared on a pedestal beside me . . . again I called Rupert . . . the thought of his near presence held fear at bay. All the same, I began to think of returning to safety. I followed a track at random, but it led nowhere. I was lost. A slight noise behind me filled me with panic, and I dashed wildly through the thicket. Shrubs impeded my passage, twigs snapped in my face, footsteps pressed upon me from behind ; darkness and the sense of spaciousness added to my terror. I came to a clearing in the wood above which twinkled some stars. I turned in another direction. I do not know how I ever found my way back to the breach in the wall, but at last I accomplished it, leapt through, rushed across the playground, mounted the stairs helter-skelter, and threw myself on my bed. Rupert did not seem to have left his at all ; he was sleeping soundly, with his broad chest uncovered. I felt as if I were waking from some horrid nightmare ! The dormitory was

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quiet and full of blue shadows dimly revealed by the night-light, but I cowered under the bedclothes, re-enacting those frantic moments of flight, still hearing the phantom footsteps at my heels.

Workmen came on the following day and rebuilt the wall. The great garden disappeared and was replaced by the familiar trees above the wall, swaying and nodding a secret understanding with me about my nocturnal adventure.

About this time Segonde came to the school one day with a big basket of cherries for me. I sat down at lunch-time beside Béreng, who was eating dry bread and learning a fable, and invited him to share the heap of fruit I placed on the bench between us. The cherries were hard and heavy and polished like enamel ;

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they dyed our lips and stained the slices of bread we munched. Béreng threw away the moist stones, flipping them between his finger and thumb. From time to time he glanced at his book ; presently he handed it to me to hear him his lesson. It was Lafontaine's fable, *Les Deux Amis*. He recited it in detached syllables—

*Deux vrais amis vivaient au Mo-no-mo-ta-pa ;
L'un ne possédait rien qui n'appartînt à l'autre.
Les amis de ce pays-là
Valent bien, dit-on, ceux du nôtre. . . .*

He had only to learn as far as the following passage :—

Lequel aimait le mieux ; que l'en semble, lecteur ?

but I read straight on to the end ; the fable attracted me so much that I read it again, especially appreciating the last line—

Qu'un ami véritable est une douce chose !

I called Béreng's attention to it, and in return, after we had gone in to study, he handed me his book open at a poem on " Friendship "

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by Ducis ; I smiled my thanks to him. Soon afterwards I received a little poem expressive of the same idea, and though the lines were less musical, they possessed the merit of being addressed personally to myself. The same evening Bérang grasped my hand when the ranks in the dormitory broke up.

From that moment we spent our recreations together, after learning our lessons side by side. Bérang told me about his native country, and described the expeditions he made in the holidays ; he related romantic adventures, to which I listened open-mouthed, till at last he burst out laughing and named the book he had drawn upon for his stories. He did this in such a fascinating way that I found no cause for offence, and was just as ready next day to hang upon his words. He used to become involved in long phrases from which he emerged panting, and often, some unsuitable word he had culled from his reading and used in a wrong sense, added pungency to his narrative.

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Our alliance was soon observed. Courtot published it by bracketing our names together on the blackboard. I had to submit to declamatory compliments from Terrouet, who indited an epistle to me, containing copious allusions to the story of Castor and Pollux. He followed me about, bowing politely, cap in hand, and congratulating M. Gilles on the literary taste which allowed him to appreciate the beautiful language and romantic imagination of the unique historian the College had the felicity of possessing. Béreng became so angry at his teasing that he stammered hopelessly in his denunciations, which only made our persecutor laugh the more. But the boys soon grew accustomed to seeing us together, and left us in peace. I liked Béreng better every day, and my submission to his leadership flattered him. He used to come of his own accord and sit beside me at lunch, and I joyfully shared my goodies with him. He repaid me with sweets whenever he was flush of cash. Once his people sent him a

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box of chocolates. I was with him when he unpacked it. It contained round tablets packed in tin-foil. "These are worth five francs each," he said as he gave me one, and I half believed it in my pleasure at receiving a present from him.

The same evening I wrote to my mother and told her I had found a friend and should soon bring him to La Grangère.

Not very long afterwards I received a summons to the parlour during a four o'clock recreation, and, to my intense surprise, I found my mother. She folded me tenderly in her arms. I learnt that my father was ill again, and as country air was supposed to be good for him, he had come to La Grangère. I was to see him the very next day, which was Sunday. My mother begged me not to bring my friend, and explained that

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the sick man required absolute rest ; she also reminded me that I must be very good and circumspect, so that my presence should prove an unalloyed pleasure to my father. I spent the evening thinking about him, and hoping I should be able to simulate sufficient delight at meeting him. I called to mind his constant indulgence in the early days of my childhood, his demonstrative affection, and the trouble he took to gratify my whims. In those days I had even preferred him to my mother. I remembered how he tried to teach me the piano, in spite of my lack of talent, and how my shyness in his presence irritated him. I vowed to myself to be natural, and to give him no cause to find fault with me. I worked myself into such a state of nervousness during the short drive from the College to the farm, that, notwithstanding his affectionate reception of me, I could not utter a word in reply. My eyes fell under his glance, my thoughts became confused, and to my bitter disappointment

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I was quite unable to show him the tenderness I felt. Happily, during that interview, and afterwards at luncheon, my mother talked incessantly of my work and my conduct, and repeated what the Headmaster had said to her the day before, concerning me. I spent the rest of the afternoon in the garden, deploring my awkwardness and longing to repair it as soon as possible. I heard my father trying to tune the old piano, which still remained in my deceased cousin's room, with other furniture that had belonged to her. But he was obliged to give it up, and went out. He did not appear at dinner, and I left without seeing him again, for I had to return to the College that evening, as my room was wanted for my parents, and there had not been time to prepare the one in the other wing that I was henceforth to occupy. My aunt promised it should be ready for the next holiday. It was underneath Segonde's attic and its windows overlooked the garden.

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The following Sunday I was able to spend the whole day at La Grangère and sleep the night, as usual. My father was better and intended to prolong his visit, so he had sent for his piano. It now stood in the drawing-room. He played the whole day long. I only saw him at meals, but the more indifferent he showed himself to my presence, the more naturally I was able to behave before him. I liked to listen to his playing, in the calm hours of the late afternoon ; the melody filled the shadows with imaginary forms. I pictured to myself dances, funerals, warriors on the march. Sometimes the piano was silent for a moment. My mother had probably taken my father a drink, or was talking to him and advising him to rest. The concert began again after dinner, and lasted long enough for me to go to sleep to the sound of the music, for my room was just above the drawing-room. I used to keep awake as long as I could, especially if my mother sang, for I loved her voice, and

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the songs my father was so fond of accompanying. As I had heard them all my life from a distance, I knew none of the words, but the music interpreted them quite intelligibly, and their tender appeal and mysterious invocation excited pleasurable emotions in my heart. I often opened the window, at the risk of being caught and scolded, so keen was my desire to hear more distinctly amid the encircling darkness. The branches of the trees vibrated, and the rustling of their leaves in the fresh breeze added a harmonious accompaniment to the melody.

The next day I could think of nothing else during the long hours of study, and Béreng, who always noted my feverish longing for Sundays, questioned me closely about La Grangère and how I spent my time there. One day, during recreation, I sat alone in a classroom lighted by a large bay-window of frosted glass, against which it amused me to try and identify the shadows of the boys who passed. Their profiles were distorted on the

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glass, and brought to my mind the animal to which I compared each of them in secret. Two came and stood for some time outside. I knew them for Bérèng and Courtot. I could hear their voices quite distinctly, and it was not long before I realised they were talking about me. Bérèng was explaining to Courtot that my aunt's continued indisposition made it impossible for me to keep my promise to take him to the farm; but Courtot was sceptical; he said one of the day-boarders had told him my parents were at La Grangère. Bérèng seemed surprised that I had not mentioned it.

"He will never let you come as long as they are there," said Courtot, and when Bérèng asked why, he replied—

"It is not his aunt who is ill, it is his father!"

To Bérèng's further questioning Courtot gave no answer at first, but presently I saw the shadow of his hand touch the shadow

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of his forehead, and he bent forward to whisper.

M. Laurin had relinquished the idea of going up for his degree. He studied less, was irritable, and was impatient with Fortin, who had begun to behave badly again. Once he muttered a coarse word, and M. Laurin summoned him peremptorily to the platform. Fortin swore he had not spoken, and pretended not to know what he was accused of. The Headmaster was informed, and ordered him to stay in bed until his memory returned and he apologised for his insolence. The classroom kept count. Fortin held out three days, and finally made his submission in such an off-hand manner that he was threatened with expulsion for the next fault. This he very soon committed, and was forthwith returned to the bosom of his family.

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Our set subsided into tranquillity with his exit, but now the Middle division began to misbehave. The new master had temporarily obtained the upper hand by dint of repeated punishments, but he was cordially detested. The initials P. B. with which he signed his corrections had gained him the nickname of "*Pelle-Bêche*," and drawings were to be found each day on the blackboard, representing this agricultural implement. Presently these sketches were to be found everywhere. Impositions were given, and bad marks for conduct lost their effect by dint of repetition. Videux was in a state of open rebellion and his whole division supported him. One morning the master was hissed when he entered the playground. All the boys were kept in until three gave themselves up, but the ringleader was not among them, and he continued to organise the disturbances. At length he committed the fatal error of writing detailed directions to one of his myrmidons regarding a "rag" for the following evening.

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The note unfortunately fell into the hands of the Headmaster. The writer was identified, condemned to solitary confinement, and presently expelled, by order of the Council. Still the division continued to give trouble, and the master proved unable to make himself acceptable. Besides, the approach of the Easter holidays, with their deliverance from school discipline, diminished the fear of punishment. Scoldings and impositions were less dreaded, and I discovered even in myself an unsuspected capacity for frivolling.

Béreng had given up pretending that all the stories he told me had happened to himself, and, in order to keep up my interest, had created a fictitious hero called Rémy, who was made to undergo every imaginable vicissitude and calamity for my edification. Béreng used to compose the story during lesson-time, and add to it in the narration. Sometimes he had a sudden inspiration he was too impatient to keep to himself, and was fain to communicate it by signs. There was a constant in-

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terchange of telegraphy, incomprehensible to the others between us. One excessively hot afternoon, our history professor finding it impossible to rivet our attention, hit upon the plan of reading us some historical anecdotes. One of them, relating to an adventure of Charles VI. in the forest of Mans, caught my fancy. Through the open door into the playground I could see the leaves of the trees shining golden in the sun and spreading dense shadows beneath them ; the very birds were hushed, but the chirping of the grasshoppers was incessant. Daunis, sitting beside me with heavy eyes, lounged half on the bench and half on his desk, his long curly hair falling over his ears. I imagined him a page of the royal suite, accompanying Charles VI. on his progress through the forest. Suddenly, in the story we were hearing, a half-naked man springs forward : " Stop, noble sire, thou art betrayed ! " he shouts. The cavalcade is dramatically brought to a standstill. I pictured the startled cry of the King, his sudden

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'reining back towards his knights, and I almost saw the flashing of the hot summer sunlight on the silver casques. The story produced a curious impression upon me, and I was still musing instead of listening, when Béreng turned round and showed me a face convulsed with laughter he was trying hard to suppress by cramming his fist into his mouth. I sat up, amused, and ready for some fantastic development of our own private narrative, but he was laughing so much that he could not communicate it to me. At last he seized his atlas, which was covered with dark paper, scribbled something upon it in chalk, and turned it towards me. I read: "Rémy is going to become insane." Whether it was the utter unexpectedness of the catastrophe, or the puzzled faces of our comrades staring at us both that set me off, I cannot tell, but I was seized with uncontrollable giggles. The master saw me and called me to him. I only recovered my gravity when he ordered me to tell him what Béreng had written. My agony

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may be imagined. I cast an appealing glance at my schoolfellows. By ill-luck I caught Béreng's eye. Another gust of laughter shook me so violently that I had to lean up against the wall and prop my forehead upon my arm. The professor raised my head. I could no longer stop laughing, tears poured from my eyes, and I tore at my collar to prevent myself suffocating. The master drew me to him, called for water, and bathed my temples. The boys were so interested that they hardly noticed the bell ringing for dismissal, but the master gave them the signal and allowed me to stay behind to recover myself.

The days passed slowly. July was drawing to a close. Already we were reckoning up hours, minutes, and seconds ; work became more and more slack, until at last it consisted mainly of being read aloud to by the masters.

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Many of the day-boarders had ceased to come ; others brought with them bottles of various shapes, full of queer drinks with which they affected to refresh themselves, but the heat of their hands, and the constant shaking of the liquids, speedily turned them into a cloudy foam, much less attractive than plain water from the fountain.

The prizes were a daily subject of discussion among us. I was hoping for something for French, as I had often been second in the class, or possibly an *accessit* for history and geography, and another for grammar. The good-conduct prize was generally attributed to Mouque. Terrouet expected one for composition ; but, soon, a more important affair claimed our attention. The Headmaster visited the classroom to announce that the two divisions would meet separately the following evening, to vote for the prizes for popularity.

Rupert seemed to be the natural choice for our set, and his triumph appeared certain.

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Béreng alone was in opposition. I had never told him of my admiration for our school-fellow, but he had guessed it from seeing me stop to watch him run, throw the ball, or jump. He used to tease me about it, and try to undermine my hero-worship for the "field-rat," as he called Rupert. He scoffed at his slowness in work, and said that his physical strength and cleverness in games were not only a poor compensation for stupidity, but were in themselves almost a proof of intellectual inferiority. He used to try to annoy him by quoting in his hearing the fable from which he had borrowed his nickname. Rupert was quite indifferent, and contented himself with startling Béreng by pretending to hit him with the ball. Béreng would fling up his arm to protect his face, and draw up one leg, but when nothing happened he relaxed his muscles, and Rupert, watching his opportunity, chose that moment to throw the ball.

Béreng opposed our selection for the prize

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of popularity with all his might. He even did so in the presence of the candidate, and made a speech to demonstrate the mistake it would be to reward mere physical strength. He suggested Daunis, but the consensus of opinion was against him. Méjean, Courtot, and Terrouet moved from group to group canvassing for Rupert ; Terrouet was actuated less by actual friendship for the candidate than by antagonism against Béreng. The elder Charlot threatened his brother with physical punishment if the little fellow did not vote according to the general desire. Daunis was indifferent, and made no effort to gain a single partisan. At last Béreng, tired of the struggle, came to me, and almost succeeded in winning me to his side. The important moment soon arrived. Méjean and Terrouet had prepared cards with Rupert's name inscribed upon them. Courtot helped to distribute them. Béreng, who had set to work too late, endeavoured to place those he had written for Daunis. I received both

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kinds, but I promised Bérang only to use his. We assembled after dinner in the laboratory. M. Laurin, assisted by the Superintendent General, collected the votes and proceeded to count them. There were only two for Daunis, Bérang's and his own; a third bore the legend: "I vote for nobody." The remainder were all for Rupert, including mine. I had not foreseen that his rival would be so entirely neglected! Bérang looked angrily at me, muttered something of which I only caught the word "traitor," and walked off arm in arm with his despised candidate. He held aloof while Rupert was chaired round the playground in triumph. I knew I had done wrong, but felt no regret; I did not think Daunis unworthy of the honour, but Rupert's success pleased me better. The latter, however, appeared not to recognise that I had in any way advanced his cause, and I was entirely ignored by his special group. I tried to mingle with it, but was chased away as an enemy. I found myself

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alone. Béreng stood apart, gesticulating in front of Daunis ; Ravet, with his hands in his pockets, scraped the gravel with the point of his boot ; Gernon chased Florent, who was laughing ; Charlot whistled through his teeth, staring vaguely before him. The Senior division presently came out from the hall, where they had succeeded us, and proclaimed a severe contest and a difficult victory. The bell rang for bed. I let all the others pass before me, and went up alone with a heavy heart and lagging feet.

The last week began. The contractors came to select a place in the playground to erect a platform for the official distribution of prizes. My days were solitary. Béreng was still angry with me. He walked with Daunis now, and told him stories ; when we met, he quoted verses from Lafontaine in a loud voice.

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I did not always grasp their meaning, but the few words I could remember, helped me to identify them in the reading-book Bérang used. Amongst others, he borrowed the following verse from the fable called *Le Villageois et le Serpent* :—

*Il est bon d'être charitable,
Mais envers qui ? . . . c'est là le point.
Quant aux ingrats, il n'en est point
Qui ne meure enfin misérable.*

I longed for the holidays. They were to me as a gate opening into fields of light from the dark corridor where I had yet to spend the last lagging days. My heart was centred upon them, and I should have liked to sleep until their dawning. I was conscious of an atmosphere I could not fathom. Conversation flagged at my approach, and when I passed on, I felt that unfriendly glances followed me. The recreations were a trial. At last I took to sitting on the doorstep of a classroom, watching the others kick up the dust or scatter the parched leaves on the

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ground. Once Charlot walked up and down near me as if by accident, but it struck me that he had some definite purpose in his mind. Presently he approached me, feigning to examine something he held in his hands. He raised his eyes timidly and asked whether I had lost a knife, at the same time showing me one of light horn with a ring, passed through it. I had never possessed one like it. Charlot remained near me. We talked as if nothing had happened, but he was more reserved than usual, and somehow the advance he had made left me feeling even more desolate than before. He pressed my hand when we went into school, and smiled in a manner that brought a lump into my throat.

After that we spent most of our time together; the others left us more and more to ourselves. Men were hard at work building the platform. We only did lessons in the morning; the rest of the day was spent either in the classroom or in the playground, though nobody played any more. One day

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I fell asleep with my head on my desk and dreamt I was free. The voice of the master reprimanding a pupil struck upon my ear with an unfamiliar sound and woke me ; there was a bitter taste in my mouth and my head felt heavy. Insects hummed and the sun shone upon the trees ; the wall-eyed cat ran across the courtyard. I came back to life with a long sigh. The bell was ringing for recreation, but I should have preferred to remain where I was, for my limbs seemed to refuse their office. I stretched myself at the foot of a tree, where Charlot soon joined me. Our comrades, grouped in front of the chapel, were apparently discussing some new game. Presently they all linked hands and formed a long chain, with Rupert at their head. They began to wind their way among the trees and circle round us, the pace increasing gradually until they were all running. As they passed our tree, Méjean, who was the last, snatched Charlot's arm and dragged him after him. At the same time Rupert made the chain

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turn so suddenly that Charlot, who was at the extreme end, and could not run fast enough, was flung like a stone from a catapult into the dust. He picked himself up crying, and limped towards the class-room, whither I hastily started to follow him when I saw that the same fate was in store for me. I scudded along to escape Méjean's outstretched hand, and, luckily for me, he was hampered by the others, and failed to catch me. The chain then changed its tactics and tried to hem me into its midst. It stretched round the entire playground ; wherever I fled I was menaced by grinning faces and jeering voices. The master of the Senior division was strolling down one of the paths, in sole charge of both playgrounds ; it would have been vain to appeal to him for help. I sought again to escape, but all the living links ran towards me, and soon I was surrounded, pressed, bruised by knees raised to strike in default of the hands which were still linked one to the other. Feet trod upon

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mine, fierce faces spat at me, and shouted : "Lunatic's son !" I hit out. With head bent, I kicked and fought desperately with feet and fists. I was frenzied with passion. I no longer felt the blows I received, I gave as good as I got. It seemed to me as if my enemies possessed but one face among them, and I rained blows about me indifferently ; but very soon I was overpowered by numbers. The chain broke up ; I was struck all over the head and body, and forced backwards. I suddenly found myself with my back to a door, which gave way, and precipitated me into the front hall. As I picked myself up I noticed that the big house door at the farther end was open. I made a dash for it.

The street was deserted under the scorching afternoon sun. I tore along without pausing for an instant. It led into the country, and I ran, with my ears still tingling from the insults received, my cheeks burning, my hands swollen and bleeding. I was bare-

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headed. The fear of being caught lent speed to my steps. I turned towards La Grangère, the only refuge left to me, and, oblivious of the heat, I continued running. The distance was considerable. I was forced to stop several times. My strength was on the point of failing altogether, when I came in sight of the longed-for goal. With a final effort I reached the vineyard and passed through it. I arrived at the back gate, and stepped into the garden path. My mother was sitting under the trees ; I called to her and stumbled into her arms.

Three days of fever and delirium followed. At first they feared for my reason, but I remember nothing but a peaceful floating back to life in the half-light of a shaded room, where, at my first call, my mother rose and laid her cool hand upon my brow. The prizes had been given the day before. Lying on the table by my side were a beautifully bound book, and a certificate, earned by my work. The College was closed. My mother soothed

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me tenderly and I felt safe in her arms. It was happiness enough to find myself at La Grangère. My sole desire was to lounge in the shade, alone, in the beloved garden.

IV

THE days passed like the flow of a tranquil stream in which the sky is faintly reflected. I lay and watched the play of sunlight and shadow on house and garden. Every morning I dragged a basket-chair under the trees, and remained there with an open book on my knees. My half-closed eyes saw very little; the soft breeze fanned my bare arms under my linen blouse. The only interruption to my dreams came when I had to move, to get out of the sun, or obey Segonde's call to a meal. My schoolfellows' names lived in the back of my mind, and if I dropped off into a nap they rose to my lips, and I started up in a fright, as if I had been caught in some delinquency; then, when I realised my surroundings, I

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smiled and fell back, comforted. The hens cackled, the leaves rustled, the roads slumbered under the noonday sun, looking like spotted snakes where the shade of the wayside trees fell upon them. The peace of nature calmed my fretted nerves.

My father showed himself very little. He took long tramps in the early mornings, and dozed during the day. He sat up late at night, working on a musical composition which absorbed his whole thoughts. My nights had improved. Segonde, who occupied the attic above my room, had been alarmed at first by hearing me struggle, scream, and talk in my sleep, but gradually the bad dreams faded, and I forgot the horrors of those last days. I kept my window open, for I loved to fall asleep looking at the stars. The scent of new-mown hay filtered in, the crickets chirped, and occasionally the note of the summer frogs rose hoarsely. I woke at dawn, to the song of the birds.

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The presence of my mother, worried and anxious though she appeared, was a constant joy to me. I joined her in the garden, where she sat embroidering all the morning, in a pretty, pale gown. In her sweet presence I forgot all my troubles and gathered strength and calmness, and if every danger that can threaten a little child had burst in at the garden gate, I should have remained unruffled, so confident was I that no malevolent influence could endure within reach of her eye. Seated on the ground at her feet I watched her grave countenance, the poise of her hand as she stabbed the stretched linen with her needle, the flutter of her short-frilled sleeve as she drew the thread through the stuff. If a leaf from the chestnut-trees above fell upon her work, she flicked it off gently and smiled as her eyes met mine. She asked me to read her some passages from my prize book, *The Thousand and One Nights*. She shared my interest in the wanderings of Aladdin through the mysteri-

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ous halls and the gardens of crystal fruit, in the processions of the slaves of the Lamp and the servants of the Ring, in the surprised delight of the poor mother before the golden dishes served at the desire of her son. I paused to discuss with her the apparition of the genii, the strange capture of the fisherman, and the various amazing incidents of the talking fishes and the enchanted princes. My fingers stuck to the red binding and I withdrew them all stained, and then my mother would laugh and put out her hands to protect her work.

My aunt seldom joined us before the afternoon, as her mornings were taken up with accounts and household management. After luncheon she brought out her needlework, and we remained comfortably silent, quite content to hear no sound but the click of the needle against the thimble. I watched the passing clouds; sometimes they looked like chariots driven at a leisurely pace, at others, I thought I could distinguish

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animals and naked figures nestling in the azure.

Evening found us in the arbour, or at the end of the kitchen-garden, where the atmosphere had been cooled by extensive watering. The stars twinkled overhead; when one flashed across the blue vault my aunt made the sign of the Cross, saying that a soul was rising from Purgatory into Paradise. Voices floated in from the fields and high road, and the trees threw so dense a shadow across the garden that I should have been afraid to walk across it alone.

The summer was hotter that year than any I had ever experienced. The afternoons were tropical. We were forced to seek refuge in the drawing-room behind closed shutters, but even there, the temperature was stifling, and we presently migrated to the

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entrance of the corridor. The door into the garden was shaded by a straw blind, through which the trees looked vaporous, as in a mirage. There was something menacing in the density of the atmosphere; it deprived me of all energy, and weighed upon my head and limbs. My discomfort was increased by the withdrawal of my mother's presence, for she usually left us at that hour to sit with my father, who was unpleasantly affected by the abnormal conditions.

Sometimes we got off with a mere threatening of thunder, but there were several terrible storms which caused us much alarm.

One of them was exceptionally violent. The morning had been overcast, but it was just towards four o'clock that the tempest burst. A sudden darkness overspread the country, and a blinding flash of lightning rent the skies, followed by a booming clap of thunder. We rushed back to the house and hastened to close every aperture; my aunt

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would have shut the outside shutters of the little sitting-room, but for the fear of letting in the rain while so doing. She turned her chair to the fireplace, covered her eyes and made the sign of the Cross at every flash of lightning. As my father desired to be left alone, my mother remained with us and continued working with a placidity somewhat reassuring to our jangled nerves; but Segonde, rosary in hand, recited an invocation in verse already familiar to me, in which I joined :

*Sainte Barbe, Sainte Fleur,
Par la croix de Notre Seigneur,
Si l'orage tombe sur nous,
Sainte Barbe, protégez nous.*

"And all those at sea," added my aunt.

A terrifying glare came in at the window, whence we could see the sky, as it were, one huge golden wound. By its light my mother was as white as the linen she was hemming; my aunt's face was like wax; Segonde, with

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closed eyes, looked like a blind woman carved in wood. The lightning played incessantly and struck several times, and my thoughts turned to those terrible days of old when the wrath of the Lord fell upon towns accursed, in the shape of rain, sulphur, and fire. For an endless space, as it seemed to us, the lightning and thunder succeeded each other ; my mother had also begun to pray, and I cowered on the floor beside her with my face hidden on her knees. At last the rain came down, a heavy, tropical cataract ; for an hour it veiled the face of the land, and filled the air with rustling sound, but it brought a welcome coolness. The window was opened again by dinner-time. The borders and thickets exhaled their perfume, the sky grew lighter, all nature breathed deliverance and relief.

My father was unable to work, so he came to us at the open door of the damp garden and watched the paths all rutted with streams of water. There was still some

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light in the sky, but the thickness of the leaves on the trees cast a sombre shade in front of us. Our eyes strove to pierce it. A whole nether world in movement could be divined among the branches with their thousand crackling murmurs. The leaves, temporarily laid by the shower, began to raise their heads and shed the drops which hung upon their every point ; the birds broke silence, twittered and preened their feathers ; one guessed at the multitude of slugs and snails climbing up flower-stems and feeding greedily. A bat circled round, flapping its wings.

The lime-trees and chestnuts formed a solid, rounded mass, topped by the oscillating point of a tall poplar. My imagination made the latter the shepherd of his flock, watching the distant horizon and the high regions where breezes fluttered and stars twinkled in the newly-washed face of the sky. It seemed to belong less to earth than did the other trees, and to quiver earlier

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than they did at a hint of coming shadows, rain, or wind; those sheltering at its feet were the sensitive crowd, ready at the first evidence of alarm to rustle and whimper, and give token of sympathy.

The spacious dome above afforded us a glimpse of the Waggoner, the Great and the Little Bear, the Polar Star, Cassiopeia, and other strange signs pertaining to the heavens.

Fruit was abundant that year, and was served lavishly at every meal. The plums fell to earth in the orchard, and when I picked them up and met my teeth in their juicy pulp, it was warm in the daytime, but iced and, to my thinking, far sweeter in the mornings. The ants devoured them even on the trees. Very soon Gentil's daughters came to collect them and pack

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them in large round baskets, which they carried off, walking heavily, one on each side, with the disengaged arm outstretched to balance them. The crop was sold in the open market, after Segonde had first taken toll for the household, and one morning when I woke up, the whole house was redolent of the odour of boiling jam. There were apricots also, rosy red, speckled with flame-colour, and peaches which my aunt picked before they were fully mature, and placed upon the sideboard of the dining-room, where they scented the whole room. The ripest were placed on the table, in a pierced china dish, garnished with vine, or fig-leaves. I loved to let my fingers wander among them at dessert.

We no longer went to the town on Sundays. We walked to the neighbouring village to hear Mass, and then shut ourselves up in the house and did not leave it again. My mother occupied herself in filling vases or cutting the dead roses from the bushes.

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My aunt read Vespers, and I took the book from her when she had finished, and skimmed through the Gospels. Their simple language opened up to me an interesting vista of lakes well stocked with fish, reflecting in their calm depths the sunny hills above. I felt greatly drawn to the Apostles and Holy Women, and clothed them all in the similitude of my own familiar friends. Martha, reliable and capable, was like Segonde; I pictured her in the house of Lazarus, preparing the meal, grumbling at receiving no assistance from her sister; or hastening to crave her Lord's intervention after her brother's death, yet failing to disguise her doubts when the Master replied: "Thy brother will rise again." To the Blessed Virgin I gave the placid brow, thoughtful gaze, and firm lips of my mother. My aunt was Veronica, because of her widowhood, and also in remembrance of her kind act in bathing my perspiring face one hot summer's day. For Mary, the sister of

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Martha and Lazarus, seated at the feet of Our Lord, I could not imagine a gentler or more dreamy countenance than that of Daunis ; while Charlot was to me the embodiment of the confiding crowd that followed the Saviour, lived upon His words, fed upon bread miraculously multiplied, and would cheerfully have ventured to Him across the heaving waters. Other faces I allotted to the personages of the great Christian drama. To my schoolfellows according to their characters, I apportioned the various parts. There was only one passage I hated ; it was when St. Peter, questioned about his Master, renounced Him before the servants ; it brought back to my mind all too painfully my own treachery to my friend.

I was interested also in the Psalms, but they were more mysterious, and inspired me with a fear I did not attempt to explain. Often in the midst of my reading, Mlle Aurélie, or some other friend of my aunt, would arrive, to return the visits we had

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paid them in winter. They were all very kind to me, patted my cheek, and commented upon my likeness to my mother. They loved the shade and homeliness of our retreat. The evening closed in upon their harmless tittle-tattle of town gossip, or their relation of the morning's sermon ; my mother gathered flowers for them, and they would have been pressed to stay to dinner but for the presence of my father at the evening meal, and his dislike of encountering strange faces. They quite understood our difficulty and left early, tactfully offering some excuse for not prolonging the visit. Often the dinner-table would be carried out on to the terrace. I loved these meals under the trees in the dusk of the summer day. My father retired early to work, my mother and aunt remained lost in thought, or talking in desultory fashion over the events of the day. The light of the candles fell upon their faces, insects buzzed around the flames and burnt their wings. I listened to their

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agonised death-hum as they dropped upon the cloth, and the black curtain of night descended gradually and enveloped us in its cool folds.

Towards the end of August my father resumed his early morning tramps and went out again at night. Sometimes he even left us before dinner. Our presence at the table seemed to irk him. He bolted the little food he ate and often pushed aside his plate before the meal was half over, leant his elbows on the table and dropped his forehead upon his hands. We relapsed into silence, and if I happened to want anything I only ventured to ask in a whisper, as if fearing to disturb a sleeper. I was more than ever careful to guard against the slightest mishap, and I hailed the moment of my father's departure as a veritable deliver-

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ance. My mother and aunt gazed sadly at each other, and after one of those long, significant looks, my mother would sit staring silently before her, while hot tears gathered upon her eyelashes.

I went to bed without seeing my father again. He had slept through the heat of the day. Towards the middle of the night, the sound of the piano he played for hours, warned me of his return home. The harmonies would steal at first into my slumbers, permeating my mind and influencing my dreams; presently the insistent call of the preludes roused me, and I came slowly back to consciousness with the gradually increasing sensation of landing on a happy shore. I enjoyed letting the music creep softly into my being and mingle with the gentle breeze, the hum of insects, and the rustle of the leaves; but gradually it drew me, and, leaving my bed, I would lean my elbows upon the window-sill to listen. Generally, my father played lengthy sonatas,

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in which the initial theme was repeated, amplified, beautified with a rich harvest of noble chords ; passionate melodies suggested a storm breaking over a forest ; broader, grander harmonies raised the mental picture of a placid lake slumbering under a full moon. These would be succeeded by an air half gay, half sad, ever broken, always resumed, yet ending never. My father must have loved the latter dearly, for he never tired of playing it. Gradually my attention failed and gave way to sleep ; half unconsciously I still followed the melodious plaint, and from my flaccid body seemed to see an imaginary being, fashioned in my own semblance, rise and stand before me in the lapis-lazuli night. I woke chilled and shivering in the humid dawn ; the birds were just beginning to twitter. I crept into bed with chattering teeth, and once my mother herself came to my room late in the morning to wake me from a prolonged sleep which alarmed her.

One day I was hopping about the garden,

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kicking a pebble before me along the path leading to the arbour. At its threshold I started, surprised at the sight of my father, whom I had supposed to be in his room as usual. He was sitting, huddled up on the bench, holding his head in his hands. My first impulse was to fly, but I repressed it quickly, walked on and sat down at the extreme end of the bench. My father seemed to be unaware of my presence. I noticed in the sand at his feet a musical stave with some notes. The stick with which he had traced them rested upon his knees. Suddenly, without raising his head, my father ordered me to go. Fright chained me to my place, and I could not make a single step, much as I longed to escape. The stick cracked in his nervous fingers, and he spoke again and begged me to go, but so gently that my courage returned; I walked very slowly to the door of the arbour, but as soon as I was outside, an unreasoning terror lent wings to my feet, and I ran with all my might.

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I bounded through the garden, jumped the flower-beds, and burst into the kitchen, stumbling and falling upon my knees. Segonde ran to me, looking terrified. I was so pale that she looked out at the door, thinking some one must have been pursuing me, then she came back and inquired the cause of my terror. I did not know what to say, so I moved away into the little sitting-room, where I gradually recovered myself.

During the night that followed, the music I was listening to stopped suddenly, and the sound of voices came to me. My mother had gone into the drawing-room. I could not hear her words, but her tone was one of appeal. She spoke several times without obtaining any answer; but one note of the piano, always the same, was struck repeatedly. At last I thought I heard my father's voice; then a bitter laugh and heart-broken sobs, mingled with a stormy improvisation which continued so long, and was repeated so often, that I fell asleep before it ceased, dreaming

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that a flight of furious birds were pillaging the thickets on the property.

August passed like a brilliant dream, and tender, September enveloped the country. Although the quantity of fruit and flowers compensated for the melancholy of nascent autumn, the shorter evenings, fresher mornings, and some indescribable change in sky and air, spoke of the gradual waning of the year. Half my holidays were over. The days which separated me from school-life were about to fall, one by one, like a sentry overcome. October would bury them in its falling leaves and snatch me from my beloved La Grangère.

The swelling grapes of the creeping vine attracted the wasps, who fastened gluttonously upon them and hummed about the doorway in alarming fashion. The vines grew heavier,

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and the purple bunches burst through the leaves like little chicks escaping from the sheltering wing of the mother-bird. The vats were got ready, the grape-pickers' refectory freshly cleaned and aired, the wine-press repaired, and in the courtyard the open vat diffused its acrid scent. The second crop of roses was beginning to flower in the garden. The blooms were larger than the early ones. They hung on their stalks like over-ripe fruit. Some were infested with green-fly. They grew in profusion, and their perfume lingered in the path along which they stood. Their curious titles were utterly unsuited to them, but had the effect of transforming them into personages with separate entities. Segonde raved over the abundance of *Gloire de Dijon*, and spoke familiarly of *Madame Bérard* and *Maréchal Niel*. *La France*, a glorious pink rose, was the only one I thought suitably named, and I was also fond of *Souvenir de la Malmaison*. *Bengale* roses, which die in a few hours, and the old-fashioned, heavily-

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perfumed moss-rose were less popular. They were left to fade on their stalks. On the other hand, some fine white blooms which grew in profusion amongst a mass of leaves, were greatly appreciated. My aunt used to send some every week to the cemetery where her husband and young daughter lay side by side. My mother told me all about this unknown cousin of mine, whose wedding she remembered to have attended when quite a child. I knew that her room, which was not far from mine, had been preserved exactly as she left it. I peeped in once when the door was open, and found my aunt there. Another time she took me in to choose a book, while she dusted. The branches of a catalpa tree caressed the half-closed wooden shutters, through which filtered a shadowy green light. A velvet *prie-Dieu* stood under a holy-water stoup, near the bed ; a bridal wreath under a glass case adorned the chimney ; a faded photographic group of young girls, with their hair done up in chenille nets, simpered upon

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' the wall. I picked out my cousin among them, from the description I had heard of her. Her long, narrow face was slightly turned aside, and she gazed vaguely before her with a wistful expression. My aunt had often said my eyes were rather like her daughter's, and she repeated this opinion, as she flipped a clean duster across the glass of the frame. Above the chest of drawers hung a bookcase containing a few books, whose titles in tarnished gilt I scanned ; they were mostly books of devotion, such as *Froment des élus* ; but there were some girls' stories. *Le Journal de Marguerite*, *Marguerite à Vingt Ans*, were there, besides *Ivanhoe*, *Graziella*, and *Les Martyres*. These attracted me less, however, than did a bound volume of illustrated papers which I selected and asked leave to carry away. On the fly-leaf were some poems written in violet ink. I recognised some words my mother occasionally sang when I was alone with her :

*Tout le long, le long du ruisseau,
Lucas marchait auprès de Rose, . . .*

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And another which I liked still better on account of the refrain :

*Attendez qu'ici-bas
Leurs beautés soient écloses ;
Laissez mourir les roses,
Ne les effeuillez pas !*

I showed them to my aunt ; she smiled, finished dusting the chimney, closed the window, and accompanied me downstairs.

The big book with its stained pages and mouldy smell kept me amused for the rest of the day. It contained fashion-pictures of ladies, wearing voluminous skirts and tiny hats, cooking recipes, designs for embroidery, and a serial story which ran through the entire volume. Every number closed with an acrostic. I tried to guess a few, but I knew where to find the answers, so my patience did not prove equal to the task. At the end of the volume I found the Christian name of Odélie, written over and over again with many flourishes, coupled with a surname

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'I did not remember ever to have heard. I showed it to my aunt. She put on her spectacles, leant over the page, and murmured under her breath :

"That must have been done just at the time of her marriage."

The setting sun was tinting the leaves of the trees with gold, and the shadows of the trunks stretched indefinitely on the green sward.

One morning I saw a little girl in the courtyard, and heard that she was a niece of Gentil and Maria, who had arrived to spend a few days with them. I was forbidden to play with her, on account of her uneducated accent, but one afternoon I inveigled her into the garden.

She wore a blue and white checked pinafore, and her pockets were stuffed as full as

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Charlot's. Her stubbly locks were drawn back under a round comb. Something in her eyes struck me as odd, and upon investigation, I discovered that she squinted. Her name was Zoé. I exhibited my domain with pride, and picked some flowers for her. I showed her the Organ-Grinder and the Muse. We did not play; she entertained me with stories about her parents, who lived about half-way to the market town, on an estate much bigger than La Grangère. The next morning she came again, and brought her doll with her. I told Zoé it was very carelessly dressed, and in proof of my words, I pointed to a strange bulge in the upper part of the dress. The little girl giggled and asked me to guess the reason of this inelegant shape. I was about to venture a suggestion when the sly look of her crossed eyes held me back; I wanted her to speak first, but she declined; so we agreed each to write down the thought we dared not confide to each other, on a piece of paper. We did

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so, and exchanged notes. On mine I had written "an abscess"; on hers I found "a watch," but a word scribbled underneath and heavily scratched out, showed me that my new acquaintance had not betrayed her secret, and her meaning smile made me uncomfortable.

We did not see each other for several days after that, but I thought a great deal about her. Her crooked sight roused my curiosity. I wondered how objects appeared before it, and tried secretly to copy her infirmity. Segonde surprised me doing so and scolded me, telling me that I should squint as badly as Zoé if I made fun of her. One afternoon I found her in the garden, whither she had accompanied Gentil, who was doing a job among the fruit trees. While we sat talking on the bench, a sudden impulse made me squint again, and I succeeded so well that I turned to ask the little girl to applaud my skill; but she jumped up and ran away crying. I realised

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I had been unkind and pursued her to comfort her. I offered flowers, my knife, a book, in my fear lest she should complain to her uncle and I be reported at home . . . but to all my suggestions she only shook her head and sobbed the louder, with her knuckles to her eyes. I was in despair, when she suddenly looked up with a bright smile and said, "Let me be your sweetheart!" Although I felt very shy, I swore she should be. She dried her eyes, took my arm, and made me escort her round the flower-beds and tell her the names of all the flowers. She swayed along languidly, pretending to hold up her frock, although it only reached her knees, and begged me to tell her whether that was how fine ladies behaved. We sat down, and in a pause of the conversation, she asked whether I had ever seen a lunatic. She stared so meaningfully at me, that my eyes fell before hers; but I made a negative sign with my head, and inquired whether she had had that ex-

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perience. She assured me she knew a house where there was one, and shook her head mysteriously when I begged her to tell me where it was. Then she jumped up and pretended to imitate an attack of madness; she threw herself about, with her lips falling loosely apart, and gibbered with outspread arms. Segonde surprised her in the act, reproved her severely for her bad conduct, and called me in to my lunch. She kept me with her, scolded me for my disobedience, and by the time I was able to escape, Gentil and Zoé had left the garden.

I saw her twice again. She knew quantities of games, and could invent others, or else introduce such variations that one never tired of playing at anything she suggested. Sometimes I was a jeweller, with a collection of precious stones for which

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she bargained ; or a guide leading her on a voyage of discovery along the paths. Another time she played at making me guess from her gestures what trade she was enacting ; but we had another game we much preferred to that. Sitting beside her on the bench, I drove an imaginary team which I urged into a gallop with voice and whip, and which bore us rapidly through far countries. The journey was full of incident ; sometimes my companion found the sun too hot ; at others, a terrible wind forced her to clutch frantically at her cloak and hat ; we slowed up to climb a hill, or pierce our way through a dense forest, where we were attacked by brigands ; then came the agonised delight of a frenzied descent. My companion threw herself backwards, grasping the seat with whitened knuckles and eyes of terror. Once she shrieked that we were upsetting, and pulled me to the ground with her. She lay motionless, and intimated that she was in a dead faint ; she said I might come to her

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assistance, for I had only sustained a simple fracture of no importance. I dragged her to the arbour, which represented an inn. She instructed me what to do for her, and begged for water in feeble tones. When I brought some in the hollow of my palms, she was away at full gallop; neighing sounds from among the trees led me in her direction, and I had to tear after her, for she had become one of the horses running away.

Her face was full of expression and humour, and unconsciously I began to love her. When we were running our hardest she would stop, shake her untidy little head, pull out her comb, and push it back into the tangle of her hair. When she talked, she betrayed her vanity by telling me of the sumptuous dresses she possessed. She described them in extravagant terms. Gold and pearls formed the least part of their decoration; when she had exhausted her superlatives, she would express their fabulous richness by a curious little way she had of biting her

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nether lip and glancing at me sideways with her best eye, shaking her head slowly. I believed every word, and longed to set eyes on all these beautiful things. But she said her parents had forbidden her to bring them to the country, and that was why she was so plainly dressed. Still, she promised to come back some day and overwhelm me with her splendour.

The time came for her to return home. Maria brought her to us one morning to say good-bye. She had taken off her check pinafore and wore a green frock with a black waistbelt and a silver cross upon her breast. I was quite moved to see how contentedly she put up with her modest attire. The grown-ups tried to induce her to chatter, but she maintained a reserve of which I secretly approved. My aunt offered her a few trifles, which she consented to accept, but in so ungracious a manner that Maria reproved her for her awkwardness, and threatened to take her away. I cannot account for my sensations

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at the realisation that Zoé was about to leave La Grangère ; all I know is that the tears rushed to my eyes and I implored them to leave me my friend. My mother and aunt were immensely amused at my sudden passion, and Maria openly made game of me. The three laughed still more when I protested vehemently that I would marry Zoé and none other. She, however, gave no sign of gratification, but stood rubbing the floor with the tip of her shoe ; she was somewhat embarrassed at being thus discussed before her face. I was allowed to kiss her, and received the assurance that my request should be duly considered. She submitted her cheek to my embrace, and left the room with a curtsy, without having once relaxed into a smile.

I missed her dreadfully when she was gone, and began to reckon almost with terror the passing of each day that brought me nearer to school. As if to aggravate my trouble, the great heat returned, and served to remind me, not only of the beautiful days already flown,

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but also of the dreariness of the lessons to come. I had to finish my holiday task, of which, so far, my mother had only let me write a few pages. She made me settle to it every day after luncheon, when she went up to my father. My aunt sat down to her sewing with the avowed intention of superintending me, but she used to fall asleep almost at once; her gentle snoring betrayed her. Then in the great silence I listened to the sound of footsteps in the room above; I heard the murmur of voices, sometimes broken by a heavy sigh, and gradually the drowsiness of the hour of siesta overcame me; the ticking of the clock and the hum of a wasp which had come in through a chink in the shutters became part of my dream.

At the beginning of September I already felt as if we had reached the end of the month.

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'One by one the days eluded us, like unfaithful guardians. October called them, and each one fell, like an obstacle the less, between happiness and my dreaded return to school. I began to live in a painful state of agitation, so that I talked in my sleep at night, and cried out the names of my schoolfellows, and thus revealed to Segonde, who slept above, the full extent of my anguish. I did not want to see either Daunis or Charlot, ever again. I felt I could not face Béreng or Rupert. The remembrance of their faces caused me insurmountable aversion; moreover, school-life appeared to me a narrow and mechanical round, the very thought of which disheartened me. I pictured to myself the dormitory, the early rising by artificial light, the sleepy study at dawn, the interminable evening lessons, the noisy recreations in which I had no share, the hostility of those last days, the bullying of the big fellows, and my languid submission to it. In my imagination, these all took shape and caught me in a web which drew

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ever tighter and tighter around me. I wondered how I could ever have borne the life, and any punishment seemed preferable to the necessity of returning to it. I suffered so much at the thought that at last I summoned up courage to open my heart to my mother; but she only chid me gently and regretfully for what she called the caprices of a spoilt child. I realised my helplessness and fell into profound depression.

The grape-picking season had begun; my aunt was very busy, and held endless conferences with Gentil. My mother seemed to have withdrawn further into herself, and to live more and more for my father, who claimed her attention every moment of the day. Only Segonde pitied and tried to comfort me. She was in the midst of her annual jam-making. She sometimes took up her position outside the kitchen, with a big copper cauldron, into which she threw the fruit, peeled and cut in quarters. I sat at her side and handed them to her one by one.

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Enormous quinces left their down and acrid perfume on my fingers. While she peeled, Segonde told me some peasant story—*Jean le Sot and his Ass*, or *Eglantine the Shepherdess*, under whose fairy feet the grass did not bend. She also knew a melancholy little roundelay I was fond of and often asked for. It began thus—

*En revenant des nocés,
J'étais bien fatigué;
Au bord d'une fontaine
Je me suis reposé. . . .*

There was a passage I liked specially—

*Chante, Rossignol, chante,
Toi qui as le cœur gai . . .
Car moi, je ne l'ai guère;
Mon ami m'a laissé! . . .*

A hen which had been chased out of the roost by the others was wandering about the garden. The smell of the ripe fruit attracted her; she did not venture near the heap of peelings, but stood looking at us suspiciously

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out of each of her eyes in turn, seemingly cogitating within herself. I threw her a few bits of skin. At first she was frightened, but presently she returned, picked them up, and tore them to shreds with her hard beak. The song continued thus—

*Mon ami m'a laissé . . .
Pour une simple rose,
Que je lui refusai !*

The grape-picking brought a number of tramps about, in quest of work. Some of them came right up to the house ; when they saw us sitting in the garden, they stopped at the gate and spoke through the bars, begging to be engaged. Segonde looked them over with an experienced eye, shook her head, and told them our numbers were complete. She was quite correct, because we employed the same people every year to gather in the crop. Sometimes some of the tramps she thus dismissed asked for alms or fruit. I was glad to carry it to them, being somewhat curious

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to investigate their condition. I used to watch them walk away, their feet trailing in the stony path. I pretended that their wallets were crammed with dead leaves which they were going to strew about the roads in honour of the approaching month of October.

Sometimes a fine drizzle fell towards evening, after a grey day. Sheltering by myself in the little sitting-room, I watched the shadows creep through the courtyard and gradually blot out the distant view. Voices could be heard ; the cow ambled home, dragging her hobble ; a distant bell clanged, sounding closer because it was wafted on the wings of the west wind. I loved that hour, but the remembrance of my approaching departure left me depressed and prone to weak tears, which I had difficulty in repressing, when darkness filled the room, and Segonde delayed bringing in the lamp.

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There came a morning whose memory was to remain for ever engraven upon my heart. The dawn woke me gently as usual. I went out early with the desire of living every minute of the few days left to me. As I left the grounds and went into the meadow, I looked back at the house. The shutters of my father's room were closed, but the next window was half open, and my mother stood in the embrasure, brushing her long hair. I called to her in a low voice. She smiled, put one finger to her lips, and signed to me to come back into the garden. I supposed my father was asleep. He had seemed much quieter during the past week, and had shown himself indifferent to many things which formerly had roused his anger. He came once more to meals, and although he was as silent as usual, I found it more possible to be myself without risk of annoying him. He lived our life, went out very little, retired to bed when we did, and stayed there all night, without rising to play the

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piano, so that his music no longer lulled me to sleep. Still my mother never left him. He had gone into the garden with her the day before, and as he passed a tree under which I was sitting reading, he paused to look at my book and lay a hand caressingly on my hair. He had spent the evening with us on the terrace, and when we parted had drawn me gently towards him as if to kiss me. I was thinking over these things and rejoicing, when I saw at my feet a little bird fallen from its nest, with outspread, fluttering wings. I took it up; it pinched my fingers with its sharp little claws, and stared at me with dilated, terrified eyes. It was a baby martin, which had dropped upon the path, and was unable to raise itself again. I ran into the house to exhibit my prize. My mother was downstairs, and was sewing near my aunt, in a *négligé*, waiting till some sound from above should warn her of my father's awakening. I played with the bird and tried to feed it with flies. It would not fold its wings,

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but left them spread wide upon the table like two broken springs, and its whole body, from its tail to its flat head, shone steely blue.

The time slipped away. My mother was engrossed in her work, and I, in my silent contemplation of the little quivering creature. The clock struck half-past nine, and still there was no sound from the upper floor. The continued silence attracted my mother's attention at last. She became anxious and resolved to investigate. She went up by the little winding staircase, but immediately came flying back to us. When I saw her face, I felt my own features contract into the same look of anguish that filled hers. My father was not in his room! She cried out to Segonde to go and search the garden; she herself ran to the kitchen which opened on to the woodyard and the high road; but, as if struck by a sudden inspiration, she turned, rushed through the dining-room, tore open the door into the front hall, and went in. We could hear her footsteps clattering on

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the tiles ; she must have gone right up to the well of the staircase . . . the hoarse scream which broke the silence froze my blood and brought my aunt to her feet. The woman who stumbled back into the sitting-room had lost all semblance of my mother ; an unfamiliar voice wailed in anguished tones : " A knife . . . some men . . . call somebody ! . . . " Segonde, who was just coming in, dashed out ; my aunt tore open the window and pulled frantically at the big bell with one hand, while she gesticulated wildly with the other. Justin was the first to arrive. He sprang into the room and followed her into the passage, banging the door behind him. .

I remained alone, trembling, listening to the sounds which came from the echoing hall : brief orders in low tones, suppressed ejaculations, heavy footsteps, the laboured breathing of a man climbing the stairs step by step, staggering under a heavy burden. . . .

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When I saw my father again, it was by the dim light of a church candle placed near the bed on which he reposed in my mother's chamber ; his face had lost its look of strain, and wore the serene expression of one at infinite peace. My mother knelt at his pillow, weeping unrestrainedly ; heavy sobs shook her frame. She was overcome with despair, for she reproached herself bitterly for having left him by himself. My aunt endeavoured vainly to reason with her, and herself broke into helpless tears in the midst of her exhortations to courage.

The house was soon filled with people. Maria and her daughters were busy in the kitchen ; Segonde moaned, and gave endless directions, which she interrupted at my appearance, to strain me silently to her bosom. People came, and were shown upstairs without a word. Mlle Aurélie arrived, and at the sight of her, my aunt wept afresh in her arms. My mother, who only prayed to be left in peace, was obliged to submit every

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moment to having her hands pressed or her cheeks kissed. She resigned herself dumbly to this additional torture; the self-invited guests sat in a circle; when their numbers decreased a little she began again to blame herself aloud and to call my father as if he could hear her. M. le Curé and the doctor had arrived at once, together, and my aunt had held a long conversation with them in the mortuary chamber. Towards evening the watch was organised. My mother refused to take any rest, and my aunt would not leave her by herself. Mlle Aurélie and another intimate friend also remained. For my part, I could not have felt safe anywhere else, and I begged not to be sent away. The following night was a repetition of the first; my mother would not hear of giving up her place at her husband's side. She was somewhat calmer, but every now and then, as if suddenly realising her wretchedness, she hid her face in her hands and tried vainly to obtain the relief of tears.

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My aunt, broken with emotion, was forced at last to retire to her own room. Segonde and Maria remained with their rosaries in their hands, looking like nuns under their black kerchiefs, with the light of the yellow wax candle falling upon their withered faces. The great silence from outside penetrated the death-chamber and was broken only by the loud cracking of the old furniture. I held my breath in the mad hope that my father would moan, or move, or call. Whenever I ventured to look upon his face, I thought I saw it quiver. I was torn with remorse. I accused myself of not having loved him enough, and of having been foolishly fearful in his presence ; the feeling that it was too late ever to repair my failing, threw me into despair. I had been placed in the shadow, in a large arm-chair. By midnight I fell asleep. When I woke, the icy breath of dawn was filtering in through the open window. The servants slept. Only my mother sat watching still, with wide eyes,

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and spirit far away. The face on the pillow had undergone a terrifying alteration.

A paralysing depression fell upon us when, after duly carrying out the funeral ceremonial, we endeavoured to resume our ordinary habits. My mother remained for hours in a condition of semi-consciousness, broken by horrible nightmares, which prevented her from enjoying any real repose. Nothing on earth would have induced me to return to my distant bedroom. From the very first evening I resumed occupation of the dressing-room adjoining her chamber. She seemed not to notice my presence near her; if I attempted to kiss her, she pushed me from her with a gesture which reminded me of my father's peevishness, and cut me to the heart.

No one spoke out loud. My aunt developed a very maternal manner and watched

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tenderly over my mother ; Segonde seconded her unobtrusively, and did the work of three. However, the time for the grape-picking had arrived, and no circumstances could be permitted to delay it. The stir it created about the house helped to restore us to a more normal condition. Gentil and Justin referred endless business points to my aunt. They used to come to the little sitting-room, cap in hand, evidently reluctant to invade our privacy, but confident of their right to do so. Sometimes my mother was alone, and found herself obliged to attend to them, and participate in the universal bustle. When she saw how much my aunt's health was enfeebled by the recent tragic event, she realised her duty and set herself to assist her ; but the austerity of her countenance betokened that her spirit was entirely engrossed by its torturing memories.

When we returned to our rooms after dinner, she used to fling herself on her knees at her bedside, and abandon herself to the

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bitter tears she had repressed all day. Sounds of merry-making reached us from the grape-pickers' refectory, and could not of course be prohibited after their day's work was over. It hurt me to hear them and to think that their distant gaiety should dare to intrude upon our grief. But my mother heeded it not at all, in her prayerful absorption. She forgot even my existence, and allowed me to go to sleep without her good-night kiss.

When I grasped her utter indifference and her complete isolation of spirit, a great resignation descended upon my soul. I no longer noted the flight of time, and I became undecided as to whether I desired to remain or to go. The heavy sorrow which had come into my life, and the black clothes that bore testimony to it, placed me in a mental isolation that no further stroke of fate could penetrate. I felt impervious to mockery and indifferent to the harsh treatment I had so dreaded. Fanciful troubles were submerged in real

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tribulation. I no longer dreamed of appealing to my mother, and when my aunt reminded her of the necessity of looking over my school clothes, I continued reading by her side without giving any utterance to my reluctance to return to College. The end of the holidays came ever nearer, till at last the time still left could be counted by hours.

Nevertheless, the last day did not dawn without a slight breaking down of my new stoicism. The sun reached my window early. Two long shafts projected themselves through chinks in the shutters, touched my pillow, and lit it with gold. I dawdled late in bed, remembering gloomily that a hasty uprising awaited me next morning. Very few hours of liberty remained to me. I wished that the rays falling across my bed might be the rungs of an enormous ladder by which I

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'could escape. The idea of flight had not before occurred to me. . . . My thoughts dwelt upon it for an instant; but whither could I go, all alone? Besides, my happiness belonged here; it was centred in my home, in the peaceful hours under the shade of our own familiar trees. It was La Grangère I loved. My only desire was never to leave it again. .

At last I opened the shutters. I saw the fields bathed in azure, above which woolly vapours floated. In the distance I could distinguish moving dots of colour among the vines, which I knew to be grape-pickers. It was a fresh morning, and the sound of their laughter was borne to my quickened senses upon the light breeze. I was enjoying my leisurely awakening for the last time; not again would the sun thus shine for me and the zephyrs murmur over the land of my predilection. I would fain have gathered these delights in my arms, and from the bottom of my aching heart I prayed for some miracle to

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interpose and prevent my departure ; yet, although I thus gave free rein to my fancies, I was well aware of their futility. The certainty that this day really and truly marked the end of my freedom, inspired me with a sudden impulse to make use of its every moment. I went down to the garden and busied myself collecting the dead leaves with a rake, lifting them into a barrow, and wheeling them to the kitchen garden. When I had finished, I set fire to the big heap. Smoke smothered the flames and choked them back to burn inside, while only a slender white thread betrayed the inward conflagration. The garden looked as if it had been swept. Very few flowers remained in it : roses, checked in their blossoming by the cold nights, long trails of creepers, swaying under the weight of their blooms. In picking some, I found among their leaves a ribbon I recognised as having belonged to Zoé. She often let one drop from her overfull pockets, and we had searched in vain for

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this one. It brought back to me the memory of my friend. I wound it round my finger, and thought sadly of her who was unaware of my heavy loss. Segonde's song returned to my memory :

Je voudrais que la rose

Fût encore au rosier,

Voyez.

Et que le rosier, même

Fût encore à planter.

Fût encore à planter !

Then with the ribbon I tied up the bunch of flowers I destined as an offering to the Muse, because Zoé had liked and admired it, called it *The Lady*, and treated it always with reverence. The organ-grinder also received a few blossoms. The ivy at the foot of the wall still attracted a few bees and gave out its acrid odour. I collected snails for the hens and added some grapes, for which they fought greedily. I went on to the courtyard. Marie was drawing water.

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I tried to help her carry the bucket and she allowed me to do so with a kindly smile. She was preparing the family meal, and began to cut up bread for the soup. She pressed the huge loaf to her breast, encircling it with one arm while, with the knife in her right hand, she pared off thin slices; the boiling water was hissing in a copper at the back of the wide-mouthed chimney. The wish seized me to taste this peasant food, and I begged for a plateful of the soup. I ate it with relish while Marie stood by and pretended to commiserate my starved condition. I must say I did not do much justice to my aunt's luncheon afterwards, and my want of appetite was presumably ascribed to my grief, for I was not pressed, as I usually was, to eat more than I wanted. Just then I began to feel so sorry for myself that I resolved to make a final appeal to my mother for the boon I so ardently desired; I persuaded myself that dessert would be the most propitious moment, so I waited;

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but dessert came and went, and still I had not summoned up courage. Then I fixed the arrival of the coffee as the signal for me to speak, but it was drunk without my venturing to open my lips. I reflected that my mother would presently settle to her sewing and I should have an opportunity of pleading my cause. I sat down in the dining-room to look at a picture book, but a better way of spending the interval before the desired interview occurred to me. I had not ventured into the corridor since the death of my father, and I did so now with creeping flesh and cold shivers; the reflection of the stained glass lay upon the tiles; my steps echoed in the silence; I entered the drawing-room. The dreary apartment, was in its usual condition of tidiness; I saw the familiar prismatic colours reflected in the looking-glass at a certain angle; the pictures on the walls stared at me with their air of disapprobation; the clock had stopped; the locked piano looked dead. A few dry leaves

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from the catalpa tree had blown in through the half-open windows: they resembled withered hearts; I picked up one which still preserved some remnant of softness, and went out. I ran up the staircase to visit my former bedroom, but found the door locked and went away disappointed, pausing for a moment before the big window on the landing to look at the view. While I stood peering through the scanty foliage of the chestnut trees, the voices of my mother and aunt came to me from below. I listened. My mother observed that she had finished looking through my clothes the day before, and found nothing missing. She added:

“Everything will do again for this year, thank goodness, though the little fellow wears out his things very fast.”

My aunt remarked:

“He is perfectly wretched about leaving you, poor child!”

“So am I. I cannot bear to lose him,” answered my mother. “But I must hide my

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sorrow from him . . . ” Then she went on. “Later he will be able to realise how I should have loved to keep him with me. Could I have done so, I should have been better able to bear my sorrow.”

“I have known solitude even greater than yours,” said my aunt, “yet I have lived through it. You must pray.”

“I do pray,” my mother replied, “but I am sorely tried!”

“Keep up your heart,” continued my aunt, “and put all your hope in the child who is left to you.”

“He is,” my mother declared gravely “the only thing that still knits me to life. My future is entirely merged in his.”

Nothing further reached my ears. The wind moaned softly among the leaves. I did not need to listen further. . . . My mother would mourn my absence, and she loved me alone! It was the dawn of a new life to me. I knew now that the keenest part of my past suffering had been the feeling

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that she was indifferent to me, and that my presence and affection counted for naught in her eyes. I went down and sat beside her on a low stool. I no longer wished to evade the return to school; I reminded myself that by the next day I should be bereaved of all I so dearly loved, but a serene courage upheld me—I was prepared to accept whatever life might hold in store for me. My mother's eyes rested upon mine and I looked at her. She stroked my cheek with her soft hand and tried to smile: my whole heart went out to her in the earnestness of my gaze.

Segonde passed, carrying a cauldron which she began burnishing with earth. The noise she made started the hens cackling. The stent of burning leaves came from the kitchen garden, where my heap was still smouldering. My mother resumed her needle and I went on with my book.

Thus the day passed in a succession of rapid incidents on which I dared not en-

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deavour to lay a detaining hand. The wind freshened. My aunt preferred to go into the house; my mother accompanied her, but I remained alone in the dying light under the trees, whence the leaves dropped heavily, one by one, to the ground. Once more I walked round the garden; I visited the friendly statues at whose feet my flowers lay wilting; for a trifle I would have kissed them, and thrown my arms around the massive trunks of the chestnuts. I returned to the bench whereon I had carved my name a year ago with the point of my knife; the paint upon it was flaking off. I sat down; the sky was turning to gold in the autumn sunset, the scattered clouds were crimson, the scent of the burning leaves grew more pungent with the approach of night. Winter was being heralded in. I dwelt upon the opening days of my sojourn at La Grangère, the long evenings by the fire, my readings under the hanging lamp, the prayers in common, and that intimate home

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life which was about to proceed without me, and of which I should henceforward only catch fleeting glimpses on Sundays, with the ever-present pang of having to leave again at once. Just then a gust of wind shook the little gate of the property; it blew open, creaking on its hinges. Through the gap my eyes followed the road winding away into distance between the darkened fields. It was the one I should have to follow, in a space of time so short that only one night separated me from it. But all I now experienced in my heart was a docile consent, a fathomless longing to serve, before which my presentiment that the concentrated hostility of life awaited me beyond the threshold of the garden, died away into impotence.

THE END

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